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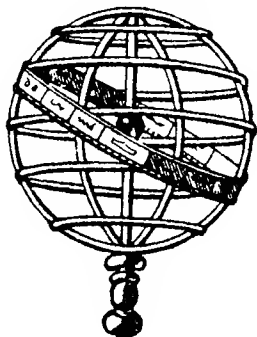
# THE LAIRD'S SECRET



By

JANE H. JAMIESON

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## THE LAIRD'S SECRET.

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BY

JANE H. JAMIESON.

‘There’s a *Providence* that shapes our ends,  
Rough-hew them how we will.’

*THIRD EDITION.*

EDINBURGH:  
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1885,

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FOR  
OLIPHANT, ANDERSON, & FERRIER  
LONDON: HAMILTON, ADAMS, AND CO.

TO  
THE MEMORY OF  
MY FATHER  
THIS RECORD  
OF PLACES AND PEOPLE WELL KNOWN TO HIM  
IS LOVINGLY DEDICATED.







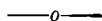
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# THE LAIRD'S SECRET.



## CHAPTER I.

### INTRODUCTORY.

'Now my heart is so full that a drop overfills it,  
We are happy now, because God so wills it;  
No matter how barren the past may have been,  
'Tis enough for us now, that the leaves are green.'



OW strange it is to be back here at Westermuir, my dear old home, and to see all the familiar places again which I remember so well, though I have not seen them since I was a child of seven years old! They are the very same as ever, though I am so changed.

The sunlight as of yore falls on the gravel paths, the birds are singing in the old laburnum-tree just as they used to do sixteen years ago. I listen for the voices of the children who once made the old walls ring with their mirth. I start—I remember: those children, where are they? One in an exalted sphere sheds a sweet radiance o'er her 'stately home;' one has carried the light of her childhood's home to distant lands; one, scarce yet in manhood's prime, gives forth to his people from week to week the words of life; one has long been sleeping beneath the willow-tree; and for the other—the youngest of that merry band—clouds and darkness

have rested on her. Ah, yes! and this task of writing I have set myself to do during my holiday month here, brings back to me in all its freshness, as nothing else could have done, the dear 'langsyne.'

For myself, I would willingly have kept hid in the depths of my own heart those feelings which are all too sacred for common view,—those joys with which a stranger may not intermeddle; but I have the honour of those dear to me to guard; and that no act of theirs may be misconstrued or misjudged, it seems right that this record be made public.

An extract from my journal (the only one I shall give) will best begin what I have to say. It was written the morning before I left school, from which I date the beginning of my life. How *young* the writing seems!

*Extract from Journal.*

'BELTON HOUSE, LONDON,  
' June 25, 1862.

'Hurrah for my last day here! We are to go home to-morrow for the holidays, and I am "finished"—I need never learn another lesson, unless to please myself. The girls are all out making good-bye calls, and I am all alone, as I know nobody here. I shall take the opportunity to begin my new diary, and the very first sentence to be specially written down in it is,—*that I am going home.*

"Home, sweet home." Such a pretty home, too! Not like poor Louisa Maitland's—(how I should hate to live in Glasgow! How *could* Uncle Maitland leave such a beautiful parish to go there—but it is well for us that he did). Everybody who visits Edinburgh is sure to go to Colston, there are so many sights about it—from Queen Mary's castle in the Dalmany grounds to Habbie's Howe and the Poet's Bower of Sir Walter Scott notoriety. The village is first-class, of course; and the manse!—but I have no words to describe *it*, except that I love it. I can see it (in my mind's eye) at this

moment, standing high up on its quiet "brae," looking serenely across to the dear old church and churchyard, with the Water of Leith sparkling through the trees at its side (I am as proud of the Water of Leith as Richie Moniplies of famous memory), and Arthur's Seat towering in the distance behind, and all the bright golden fields round about—so different in all respects from grim old Westermuir. What would papa say if he saw this? Papa says Westermuir is his first love, and he is very loyal to it (but then *he* lives in his study; it is all the same to papa where he lives, if only he has his beloved desk and books); I am sure it would never be mine. Broom, and whins, and heather,—not to speak of "moors an' mosses many, O,"—may be all very nice and pleasant for sportsmen and bees; but *I* like corn-fields, and green parks, and flower-gardens, and plenty of people coming and going, a great deal better. Who wouldn't?

'How Nurse fires when I tell her this! She says, "The Minister disna say that; an' I'm no' heedin' for naebody else" She always will call papa "*the* Minister," as if there were no other,—just as Mr. Scott of Dalmany rejoices in the designation of "*the* Laird," because he is the largest land-proprietor in the place.

'Poor dear Nurse! she is like the Israelites of old, always looking back upon the goodly land we have left, and foreboding that our "cucumber and garlic" days are for ever at an end. But to be sure it is her "Fatherland."

'And yet, how she boasts of "the castle that was ance Queen Mary's (that her faither had ta'en frae the auld Earl o' Colston, the Laird's forbear, for something he had dune), and that she gied back till him hersel'" And how proud she is to point out Dalmany to city friends, as "the biggest gentleman's place in a' the Lowdens" (I wonder, though, what she is saying to the goings on in the chapel there of late!), and to tell what great people the Scotts were about the Court "in the auld Stuart days, when Scotland *was* a country," and how true they were to their sovereigns,—losing their title for their

loyalty in "the '45,"—with as much pride as any Colstonian of them all! "Speak o' yer Sir Johns, an' yer Lord Hermistons!" she will say in a grand climax. "Pity me! nane o' *them* wad hae gotten a nod frae the Dalmany folk in thae days."

' Well, I have been very happy here,—quite at home. It is really not at all like what my ideas of a boarding-school were, except in being packed off to bed every night at half-past nine,—which I decidedly object to; and in the morning when the great bell rings at six o'clock, and you must get up, or you will be hauled out by the hand or foot—whichever is most in the way. Mr. and Mrs. Lambert have been like a father and mother to us; and they are both so good. Papa was right when he said (when Harriet and Marianne came here four years ago) that he was sending us where we would be educated for another world as well as for this. I shall be sorry to part with the girls; some of them are very nice. I think we have put some spirit (not brandy) into each other, and done each other good in many ways.

' I think, too, that we have seen all that is worth seeing in London (and in Paris, where we went at Christmas), and that is a great deal. Papa wished us to do so, and Mr. Lambert says we cannot form a proper estimate of things, even our own,—until we have had a wide experience. So we have been everywhere—even to the opera and the theatres (which I didn't care for at all, though it was Miss Faucit all the three times I was there). We have also heard all the great preachers,—the Bishops, Deans, etc.—and seen the Queen, and the Court ladies, and all the exhibitions, to our hearts' content. I am sure it will give me, and Louisa too, plenty to think of, all the rest of our lives.

' How delicious it was yesterday coming from Kew to stand on the bridge at mid-day, while the clocks were striking the hour, and look down the river, with the boats sailing up and down, just like a picture (a living one)! The University boat-races came off a short time since, and the girls tied their

hair with dark-blue ribbons, as they were nearly all on the Oxford side. I was asked why I had not on blue, and my answer was that I had no interest in Oxford, till all at once it occurred to my memory that Mr. Scott had been there ; and I forthwith adopted a dark-blue dress, a blue tie, and such a profusion of blue ribbons that I felt quite in the blues !

‘By the way, I wonder if Mr. Scott was amongst those swells we saw arriving from the Derby that day we were coming from the Horticultural Gardens ? They had on blue veils, and were driving at a dashing rate, in hansoms,—in fact, in my opinion, doing the thing han’som’ly ! He must be tremendously “fast,” if he is all that Robbie Gourlay depicts him !

‘(N.B.—That is a dear old man, second dux of the lovable people in Colston, Sir John Maitland being first ; and, by the way, I must state here that Cousin Louisa is no relation to Sir John ; she has the same name, that is all.)

‘Speaking of Robbie Gourlay, I wonder if nothing has been heard of his poor daughter all this time. It was such a *strange* thing to disappear from her situation all at once, and never to be heard of again ! They were all so proud of her, too ; and such a lovely girl she was, to be sure ; but a vain Flibbertigibbet as ever was ! Poor Kitty ! she must be dead ; she would never have stayed away these two years without letting her friends hear of her if she were alive.

‘Mrs. Lambert called me to the parlour, when I was writing the last line, to see the new bonnet I am taking home to show Marianne the fashions. Such a beauty ! all tulle and forget-me-nots. The idea of me wearing such a bonnet !—*I*, who was told by the girls when I arrived here, that when they first saw me they thought me the ugliest girl they had ever seen, though they qualified the remark a little by adding, “that when they knew me *they didn’t think of it.*” Complimentary, to be sure, and something like a talk I overheard about myself at a little party at aunt’s, the night before I came here.



How angry Marianne was when I told her, though I only laughed !

‘I was sitting at a table looking at some engravings near a group of ladies, who were so busy discussing everybody in the room that they never noticed me, when my attention was suddenly roused by hearing my own name mentioned, and certainly not in the most flattering terms.

“ ‘She’s not improving in her looks,’ were the first words I caught, in a voice I did not recognise.

“ ‘Who?’ asked a lady, who had not been attending to the remarks.

“ ‘That girl Helen Fitz-James, with her sallow face and great staring eyes, and those ropes of black hair coiled round her head. It is to be hoped she will be taught to dress it properly at school.’

“ ‘Oh, well, but she has a very nice expression,’ said the lady who had spoken before. “I think it quite redeems all that.”

“ ‘Nonsense ; she’s hideous !’ pronounced the other (who, I am sure, must have been an old maid) ; “I can’t imagine how such a Gorgon ever got amongst such a good-looking family ! It’s most extraordinary.”

“ ‘Good-looking !’ ejaculated another voice ; “that is surely not the word. Harriet and Marianne Fitz-James are lovely ! you couldn’t possibly pick out a fault in their features.”

“ ‘Well, I don’t know,’ was the retort, spoken crossly enough ; “Harriet is a vain peacock ; she thinks every gentleman she meets is in love with her (she’s in love with herself, at all events), and she has such an affected way of lifting her eyes and looking you all over, and then turning away, as if nobody was anything at all beside *her*. Oh, I don’t like her ! As for the other one, she’s not so affected, but she’s just a doll —there’s nothing in her.”

‘What further agreeable remarks might have followed I had no means of judging, as some one came up just then and began to talk to me ; but I think I had heard enough for one night. Really I had never thought myself so very ugly till

then, and I don't quite believe it yet, though I know I'm not a beauty. My own opinion is, that I would be passable enough if I had not two such beautiful sisters ; but of course when people speak of the "two lovely Miss Fitz-Jameses," I am altogether left out of the question. Well, as Nurse says, "I'm no' carin'," the fox's philosophy is the best ; and as Miss Ophelia says, "People may like you though you're black." It must be very nice, though, to be able to give pleasure just by showing one's face, and a beauty can always do that whatever she may be otherwise. I ought to be proud of my sisters, and so I am. How they are followed ! Marianne not so much, perhaps—she is in a less out-of-the-way style ; but Harriet—what a lot of beaux Harriet always has about her wherever she goes ! At parties it is a perfect scramble who will dance with her, or hold her gloves or bouquet if she lays them down for an instant, sometimes actually "tossing for it" who is to have the chance of taking her in to supper. If I were Harriet, I should think it extremely annoying to be beset and watched and waited on in that way all for my looks ; but, to be sure, it may be a case of "fox and grapes," as nothing of the sort is likely to befall me.

'I must be sure to take home all my photographs. What a comfort it is to have all one's friends beside one to look at in a foreign land ! Marianne and I very nearly quarrelled once about my taking possession of this one of Cousin Charlie, but that was before I had found out that they were engaged ; and then she showed me her ring and all the other treasures he had given her. Poor dear Charlie, no wonder May loves him ! he is such a fine, handsome, manly fellow, it is positive sunshine to look at him ! What a pity he had to go so far away as India ! I hope he will soon make his fortune and be able to come home.

'Really, those are most extraordinary changes going on at Colston, to judge from home letters ; I wish I may know the dear old place again. To think of Queen Mary's old chapel, of all places, being re-erected as a place for Protestant worship !

It makes me angry to think of it, on that pretty velvet slope, staring our dear old church out of countenance! Mr. Scott, of course, is at the bottom of all that. I am beginning to hate him already, before I have even seen him. And Mr. Charteris! Well, he *has* come out at last, with his candles and crosses and millinery! but I am not surprised at *him*, he was always a great deal more like a Popish priest than an English clergyman, and I fully expect he will turn out to be one some of these days. But what will Robbie Gourlay and all our sturdy Colstonians say to these new-fangled doings in our very midst? And Tom! I wonder what Tom is saying about them; he hates all that sort of flummery. I remember Robbie's ire long ago when Pat Murphy, the tailor at Colmuir End, boasted (to tease him, no doubt) that "he would see Queen Mary's chapel hould up its head again before he died." "I wad like to see ye try't," said Robbie, with an admonitory shake of the fist at the aforesaid Pat; "I wad like to see ye try t, as lang as there's ae hatchet to the fore an' ae arm to haud it up." But whatever Robbie's thoughts and threats, and whatever Pat's, certain it is that the chapel "holds up its head again" as high as ever, and has service in it duly performed every day, "no man forbidding it." It is marvellous what the wolf can achieve when he puts on the sheep's skin!

'A letter from home! More commissions for that Soldier's Home Bazaar Lady Maitland is getting up. It is just a post too late for me; my trunks are all packed and corded ready to start in the morning; I must just get these things in Edinburgh. Dr. Blackburn again! Can they not write a single letter without mentioning him? He will be another of Harriet's victims, I suppose. If so, I pity him. Harriet is expecting something far grander than a country doctor! But here comes Louisa to go with me for a farewell walk in the park. I must put away my journal, and get ready to go out, and for the last time in London. Hurrah!'



## CHAPTER II.

### HOME.

‘Hame, hame, hame,—oh, it’s hame fain wad I be!’

**T**HE parting with our teachers and school companions, when it really came to the point, was harder than we had thought, for we had been more than a year together. But at last we got it over, and a few hours’ flying through the air effectually restored us.

I little thought—I little dreamed—that, in leaving my school days behind me, I was quitting the safe and sunny shallows of the brook for the river into whose currents I had already entered, though I knew it not, where the great deep sea would be all around me, and where my feet might find no standing. Ah! God help all those who must ford that river, for vain is the help of man.

We remained all night in Edinburgh, as it was late when we arrived; and we had of course a great deal to tell as well as to hear from our cousins after our long absence, and very merry and happy we all were as we sat at our ten o’clock tea, the joy of finding ourselves once again in Charlotte Street, and so near home, after being away for a year and three months, making all else delightful.

Next morning, soon after breakfast, brought papa and Uncle Maitland to claim their respective daughters,—some special church business (I forget now what) having necessi-

tated their presence in Edinburgh on that particular day. They soon went away to their meeting, and we went out on a shopping expedition to execute the commissions I had omitted in London. Oh the joy of finding myself once again in Edinburgh streets! I had seen no city like it since I left it; and I remember I used to wonder as a child if the New Jerusalem would be finer than 'mine own romantic town.'

Then came our mid-day dinner, and the good-bye kisses (partings these, like a pair of scissors, to meet again, as my aunt and cousins were to follow me in a few days to Colston for the summer). Then Uncle Maitland and my dear Cousin Louisa went away to their home in the west, while my other cousins and I (my luggage having been sent home the night before) walked leisurely along Princes Street to the S.S. Library to meet papa.

And here befell a thing which was rather odd to think of afterwards, though it did not strike me so much at the time.

We had not gone far from aunt's door when a gentleman crossed from the gardens and came towards us, whom I saw to be the Dalmany factor, whom I knew to bow to, though that was all. He was not liked on the estate,—very much the reverse: he was a tyrannical, disagreeable man to be under, and suspected of many underhand practices—the chief of which being that his principles were other than he professed; and people wondered not a little that the late Mr. Scott should have put such a person into power; but of course I had nothing to do with that.

He lifted his hat as he approached, and then, to my no small astonishment, he stopped, with the air of an old acquaintance, to express his great pleasure at seeing me home again.

I thanked him, of course; but it must have been with some degree of reserve, for I felt considerably surprised that the acquaintance between him and the Manse should have

progressed so remarkably during my absence, as his manner seemed to indicate, and I to have heard nothing of it. My cousins had walked on, while Mr. Morton proceeded in the most insinuating manner :

‘May I detain you for one moment, Miss Fitz-James,—just to ask a single question? I am aware you take a great interest in the village people, as I do myself. Do you happen to know whether the Gourlay family have heard any tidings of late of the daughter who disappeared so strangely two years ago?’

I told him that so far as I was aware nothing whatever had been heard of her since her disappearance.

‘I do not myself know the family so well as I would wish to do, being an old residenter in the place,’ he went on. ‘The old man has always avoided me; he is a bigot of the old fanatical school, which I thought had been exploded in these enlightened days (I am sure your good father disapproves of that spirit, Miss Fitz-James), and cannot pass over my being of a different persuasion.’ (Mr. Morton was an Episcopalian, *he* said, but there were not wanting those who openly accused him of being a Papist at heart, and the conjecture had gained great ground of late by his zealous patronage of the chapel at Dalmany and its clergyman, who had all at once become so suspiciously ‘high.’) ‘But I would willingly hear of his welfare for all that. Then the report current in the village, that the girl had turned up some time ago, is without foundation?’

I shook my head. I was sorry I could give him no information,—adding, however, that I feared the rumour could not have been true, else I should have heard.

‘I am very sorry. I was in hopes they had had good news. I must apologize for having detained you, Miss Fitz-James. I shall wish you good morning now.’

But go away Mr. Morton did not.

‘You would hear that Mr. Scott is expected down shortly?’ he resumed (as if the news were likely to interest me as

much as himself), at the same time walking forward with me. 'He will reside amongst us for the future, I hope, and I am glad of it; it is always a blessing to a locality to have the landlord resident in it. But would you believe it? the people are far from appreciating the benefit; they have taken up a prejudice against Mr. Scott, before they have even seen him, simply because he is an Englishman, and of course belongs to a different church. They are an awful set of bigots the Colston people; I never saw their equals anywhere. Miss Fitz-James,' he added in an insinuating tone, as I walked on rather impatiently, '*you* could do a great deal to modify this feeling, if you would kindly interest yourself in the matter. I know your influence among the village people, and I am sure your recent residence away from home must have taught you to be tolerant of the opinions—especially the religious opinions—of other people.'

'Certainly,' I said, rather at a loss what answer to make to this, and doubtful of my ground altogether. 'But I did not need to go from home to learn that lesson.'

'Then you will do what I ask?' he said eagerly. 'You will try to instil some of your own liberality into the minds of those bigots? And allow me to say that the way to do so most effectually is to influence Dr. Blackburn: only get *him* to suspend his judgment of Mr. Scott, and *he* may be trusted to do all the rest.'

'I have no acquaintance with Dr. Blackburn,' I said shortly and coldly, for I was indignant now at being detained so long in the public street, and by a person I disliked.

'But you will make his acquaintance now. He is on the most intimately friendly terms at the Manse, and he is beyond all question the most popular man in Colston. The rest of us—clergymen, priests, and laymen—may hide our diminished heads as soon as we choose. The influence he has among the working classes—even the Irish at Colmuir End—is extraordinary! If we could secure his friendship for Mr. Scott, and that of your family, Miss Fitz-James, I think it would be



a boon not merely to himself personally, but to the entire parish.'

'Mr. Scott is not likely to want friends,' I said, not a little amused at Mr. Morton's comfortable conviction that *he* could arrange Mr. Scott's friendships.

'No ; but good friends, Miss Fitz-James, are not to be had every day ; and Mr. Scott (I may say it, for I have known him all his life) deserves to have *good* friends. He is a most amiable and estimable young man, and will be an acquisition to the neighbourhood. I am sure you will like him when you know him, which I hope will be very soon.' And again shaking hands most cordially, and raising his hat, my unexpected companion at length bowed himself off, and I hastened to overtake my cousins.

'What on earth were you and Mr. Morton talking about so long ?' they asked in a breath, as I came up to them. 'We did not know you were on such intimate terms.'

'I did not know it myself,' I answered, laughing, 'but it appears that we are ;' and we all three hastened on to the library, as papa must have been waiting a long time.

Surely there is nothing in all this world of ours more delightful than a welcome home, after an absence long or short. To know that loved ones are eagerly watching our coming,—a large circle, it may be,—to whom we are as part and parcel of their being, and whose smile would be less bright if we were away, is a happiness indeed seldom, perhaps, fully realized until we have lost it ; and *then*, if never before, we realize in all its sweetness, when too late, the priceless treasure that was ours. But my home was still blessed, and a joyous greeting awaited me there.

It was the sweetest hour of the June day—the hour I always like best for arriving anywhere—when papa and I reached Colston. The labourers were trooping homewards from the fields, implements on shoulders, tired, doubtless, with their day's work, but still able to make the roads resound with their heavy tread and cheerful voices ; while through

the open doors their wives might be seen hurrying to and fro, in busy preparation of the evening meal, or out among the strawberry-beds in the little gardens behind. The hedges were full of roses and singing-birds; with *such* a sky overhead! and the fields on either side were alive with troops of children loose from school, and enjoying themselves to their hearts' content. Life looked very bright and cheerful everywhere about.

It was worth my fifteen months of absence to be embraced and welcomed as I was that night, when the train stopped at the pretty little station, with its white paling, and deep hedge of sweet-brier, through which the pretty wild roses, pink, red, and white, twined their fairy tendrils.

'The Manse has turned out to meet us, Ellie,' said papa; and, looking eagerly from the window, I saw a well-known group looking as eagerly for us,—Marianne half dancing, and Harriet holding back little Harry (the 'Benjamin' of the family by eleven years) as he was springing forward. The darling boy! what a shout he gave when he saw 'Ellie's head at the window'!

Was it sisterly partiality, or was it truth, that of all the lovely faces I had seen since I left home, none could compare with the two now before me? Marianne was charming, with her fair hair and blue eyes, rosebud complexion, and sweet sunny smile; but Harriet—Harriet looked a queen! with her dark dreamy eyes, exquisite complexion, and beautifully moulded features, with just the *souçon* of *hauteur* in her bearing,—their pretty muslin dresses and garden hats setting off their different styles to almost equal advantage.

'How you have grown, Ellie! you are above us all now!' cried Marianne, clasping me in her arms, with her own sunny smile. 'And isn't she improved, Harriet? *Isn't* she improved?' she repeated, when no one would give me a compliment.

'Yes,' said Harriet, smiling, and embracing me also; 'but we must not speak of her "growing," now she is nearly eighteen, and a "finished" young lady'

‘She is just a second edition of yourself, Harriet,’ said papa, looking as if the idea pleased him greatly. Whether Harriet was equally pleased, however, was another thing; she only laughed.

‘That is not fair, papa,’ she said; ‘you know the second is always the improved edition.’

‘The first is generally the *re-viewed* one though, Harriet; so you may make a compliment of it after all.’

‘Don’t fall into the fire at that rate, papa,’ said I, laughing, ‘or we will all run away, and you may get out as you best can.’

The station stands at the entrance to the village; so, with Harry holding fast by my hand, we all walked on in a line along the quiet country road, past a long row of pretty cottages,—each with its little garden behind sloping to the ‘Water,’ and its white paling and wreath of roses of all colours in front,—most of the inmates of which came out to their doors to greet me as we passed down the little incline at the end of this row, which the villagers call the ‘short brae,’ to the bridge, moss-grown and venerable now, which had seen many ‘another sight’ in days gone by.

On the bridge (which, *en passant*, I should explain was part of the road which crossed our noble Water) we met Sir John Maitland, with his dogs as usual jumping about him, who greeted us in his good-humoured, off-hand way.

‘Ha, young ladies! blooming as ever, I see. Glad to be home again, Miss Helen, eh? The “coming out” must be at Woodlands next month, mind. Doctor,’ turning to papa, ‘you are the very man I wanted to see; can you give me two minutes? Those confounded teetotallers have been pestering me again with their petitions. What am I to do about it?’ And, seeing them on business thoughts intent, we walked on, I looking eagerly round at all the dear old places as we passed.

‘Isn’t Sir John a darling?’ said Marianne, when we were out of hearing. ‘What a difference between him and that old

piece of buckram Sir James Elphinstone! I saw him ride past as you came out of the train to-night,—old poker!’

‘Sir James Elphinstone has a better right to be proud than Sir John,’ said Harriet, with a touch of Nurse’s local pride; ‘he can count his family twice as far baek.’

‘What of that?’ said I, laughing. (I had forgotten Harriet’s little ‘weakness’ on that point.) ‘I daresay Sir John could count as far baek as anybody,—and ourselves too, for that matter.

“The son of Adam and of Eve;  
Can Bourbon or Nassau go higher?”

I don’t think it such an overwhelming honour to have “erept through seoundrels since the flood”’

‘Nor I,’ said Marianne, shrugging her shoulders; ‘but, you know, that is everything to Harriet. Just because they have a long pedigree, she admires even Sir James’s frown and Lady Elphinstone’s sneer.’

‘You will allow that it is a distinetion which only a privileged few have, to belong (like Sir James or the Scotts) to the great old historial families of the land, who made the country what it is, and fought for its independencee from the earliest times? You who are such an admirer of the grand old chivalry, Ellie,—you will surely grant that?’

‘I would rather have my own aneestry, Harriet,’ I answered sturdily. ‘I think they were a thousand times nobler—plain country people as they were, on both sides. *They* were the true chivalry of Seotland (those old barons fought for their own private, selfish ends); our ancestors fought for their country’s best interests, and they won their cause, and ensured her independencee in the highest sense. And I am prouder of *them* than if I had been “the daughter of a hundred earls.”’

‘And those old Earls of Colston,—as the Scotts were in those days,—what did they ever do but mischief long ago?’ cried Marianne, with unusual energy for her; ‘fighting to keep up Queen Mary and her Poperie when everybody else wanted them down; and then fighting for the Pretender!’

They deserved to lose their title in "the '45," as Nurse calls it. And this one would just do the very same if he had the opportunity.'

'That is as you look at it,' Harriet said, maintaining her position with the quiet determination habitual to her. 'I think that some of the adherents of the Stuarts showed as great heroism and loyalty, in every way, as the so-much-lauded Scottish Covenanters. But of course that is according to the view one takes. At all events, we need not take the trouble to predict what people we know nothing about are likely to do.'

'I know that he is doing all in his power to bring back those days you admire so much,' said Marianne energetically, standing her ground. 'To go no further, look at that;' and she pointed to the chapel, towering its white front and pointed spire among the Dalmany woods. 'What call had he to "restore" Queen Mary's chapel, that had so much better have lain still in ruins, and insist on all the people on the estate attending it. That is Popish, sure enough.'

'Have many people followed Mr. Charteris to Dalmany?' I asked, as we turned up the long ascent—the 'Manse brae,' as it is popularly called—leading to the Manse. (Mr. Charteris, as I ought to have stated before, had been the Episcopalian clergyman in a neighbouring parish, and had been translated about a year ago to the "restored" chapel at Dalmany.)

'None of the Colston people,' said Marianne, as Harriet did not seem inclined to speak on the subject. 'The Elphinstones, and Andersons, and Admiral Scott, of course, go there now, as it is much nearer for them than Edinburgh, though I don't know what they say to the "innovations" that have been introduced lately. And some of the people go up to the services, sometimes from curiosity, but that is all. I don't expect it will gain much ground amongst us.'

'I should wonder very much if it did,' I said indignantly. 'And so Mr. Scott is coming down here to stay, papa tells me? Well, I'm sorry. I suppose all our pleasant rambles in the

woods must be over now, unless we wish to be "*persecuted with the utmost rigour of law.*" Oh, there's mama looking out for us!' and, forgetting all boarding-school proprieties, I bounded forward through the gates and up to the front door (Harry and Tartar, our great, clumsy, faithful Newfoundland, keeping me company), exclaiming, as I rushed into her arms, 'Oh, mama, I'm *so* glad to be home!'

Mama was looking 'just uncommon bonnie,' as Nurse would say, as she stood on the doorstep, in her pretty grey dress and Queen Mary cap,—which always becomes her so well,—holding out her arms to welcome me. Even Tom was at the door, though he said 'he had only come down-stairs to see if tea was ready;' as if I believed that, when I knew he had been watching for me for the last half-hour—and it would have been strange if he had not. (Tom was my twin-brother; he, and Harry, and we 'sisters three,' constituted 'the family.')

'But where are all your airs, Ellie?' demanded Tom, as, the first greetings over, we stood in the parlour, where tea was set, telling and hearing all the news. 'I thought all school-girls had lots.'

'But I am not a school-girl, and I don't approve of airs; I leave that to students and conceited young ministers,' retorted I, just escaping a pinch on the ear, and running up-stairs to take off my hat and jacket.

Here I found Nurse and Betsy impatiently awaiting me, resplendent in new caps and new-starched muslin aprons, in honour of my return.

'Eh, Miss Heelen,' Nurse exclaimed, enclosing me in her kind arms, 'ye dinna ken hoo we've wearied for ye! an' ye're bonnier than ever ye were.'

(I might easily have been that, and yet have nothing to boast of after all.)

Betsy, too, who had come with us from Westermuir, and had been with us nearly as long as Nurse, was not less demonstrative. It was pleasant to be so welcomed.

'But I must tell you the compliment I heard Robbie Gourlay

pay you yesterday, Ellie,' said Marianne, when we had got at last into our own room, with its two little white beds, which she and I had always shared (and which had been our night-nursery as children), looking into the courtyard and glebe beyond, with a distant glimpse of the Kinleith Road. 'I was sitting here at the window, and he was digging up the weeds in front, when Nurse came out, and they began to talk. I didn't hear what she said, but I distinctly heard his stentorian tones, "Weel, she's maybe no' to ca' just bonnie, Miss Heelen, but she's aye sae fresh an' sae sweet, like a rose after a shoor o' rain; an' she has een like the stars o' heeven—I ne'er saw een like them. To ma thinkin', she's far afore the other twa, even in the looks pairt o't." What think you of that, Miss Ellie?'

'Good Robbie! it is worth while to be a favourite of his,' laughed I; 'but he should have better taste when he had such a beautiful daughter. Poor Kitty! I suppose they have heard nothing of her since I went away?'

'Oh no; they don't expect ever to hear of her now. She must be dead, else they would surely have heard something of her before this.'

'Poor Robbie, what a trial it is for him! he was so fond of Kitty! If they could only hear for certain, one way or another, it would not be so bad; it is the *mystery* that is so terrible.'

'Yes, it is a terrible thing altogether. The idea of any one disappearing all at once, and never being heard of again, is dreadful to think of! But Robbie never speaks of her now to any one, not even to papa; and you had better not touch upon it either, Ellie.'

Certainly not; it was not for me to intrude upon a sorrow like that. But I could sympathize with them all the same, though it was not put in words; and I did.

'And you are really glad to be home again, Ellie?' Marianne said, with a smile, as I was eagerly looking out of the window at the dear old place before going down-stairs.



'Oh, so glad,' I said, with a sigh of heartfelt satisfaction. 'I wearied very much the last six months, though Mr. and Mrs. Lambert certainly gave us variety enough; but there is no place like home.'

'I think so too, but I shall have to go away far enough some day;' and she sighed half wistfully.

'We need not think of that for years to come, I hope, dear; don't cloud my first night at home by putting me in mind of it;' and, putting my arm round her, we went down-stairs.

What a merry tea we had that night! talking so fast, and making such a noise, that papa had to institute a rule that not above three should speak at a time! How they laughed when I told them of my promenade along Princes Street with Mr. Morton! and still more at our conversation,—all but mama, who is always charitable in her judgment of others—dear mama! But they did not know what to make of it, any more than I did.

'We may be wronging him though, after all,' papa said, looking thoroughly mystified. 'I can't see what object he could have in speaking to Ellie, unless it was genuine regard for the young man's interests, as he professed. And yet what can she do, poor girlie?'

'Oh, he is honest enough in that,' responded Tom energetically; '*that* is essential to the success of his plans. The chapel party have become most eager for popularity of late; and it is indispensable that Mr. Scott should attempt, at least, to vie with the doctor and you in that respect, if he hopes to influence the Colstonians in favour of his Ritualism. And my impression is,' added Tom mischievously, 'that from her long stay in England, and her visits to the Popish cathedrals in Paris,—all of which he has heard about, depend upon it,—and altogether, Mr. Morton thinks Ellie so thoroughly Anglicized that she will be a valuable ally in carrying out his designs, whatever they may be.'

'He is very deeply mistaken, then,' said I, with some heat.

'I am far more thoroughly Scotch in every way—if that can be—than before I went to London. I like Scotch people, Scotch preaching, Scotch scenery—everything Scotch, a thousand times better now, by comparison.'

'Don't be so vehement, my dear. Nobody doubts you,' said Harriet, laughing. 'Poor Mr. Morton, he didn't know what an unreasonable and preposterous request he was making in asking you to use your influence to secure a tolerable reception for a stranger coming among us for the first time!'

'If Mr. Scott deserves the good opinion of his tenantry, Harriet, he will soon gain it, without anybody's help,' I said, somewhat annoyed at her manner; 'but it would be very dishonest in me to try to influence the people, even if I could, when I really doubt if his coming is not a very great calamity to the parish: judging by the signs we have already, I should say it is.'

'I am sure it is,' chimed in Mariannc,—'if for nothing else than the troops of idle servants swarming about everywhere. Some of them came down last week with the horses and dogs, and have been lounging about the village and roads ever since; and with them, and that Chapel bell ringing morning and evening, Colston is not like the same place.'

'Yes,' said papa, somewhat sadly, 'there is no doubt that changes are at hand for Colston; and, like Ellie, I question very much if they will be beneficial. But it is for some wise purpose they are permitted, and good will be brought out of them in the long-run—there is no doubt of that. We have been so peaceful and undisturbed for so long a time, that perhaps we needed to be reminded that it could not last for ever,—that this is not our rest.'

'Well,' said mama, after a short silence, "'the Lord reigneth,'" and He can overrule this seeming evil for good, in His own good time and way. He has done so abundantly in other cases,—both to our own beloved Church, and to the country at large,—and He will do so also in this.'

‘Colonel Anderson was telling me yesterday how wonderfully the chapel had prospered since it was opened, and how many new adherents they had gained of late,’ said Marianne, after another pause. ‘He is a good old man, but rather weak, I think. If Mr. Scott is a young man of the same calibre, Mr. Morton will have it all his own way very easily.’

‘He is not so, however,’ said papa, as he rose to go to the study. ‘Sir John, and others who know him, say that he is a very manly young fellow, with a very decided mind of his own. His father was a bigoted Ritualist, almost a Papist indeed latterly ; but his mother, Lady Sophia Scott, was a sound Protestant and true Christian, very gentle, but very decided, and she lived long enough to influence her son’s mind to some extent, for he must have been nearly sixteen when she died. She was as intelligent and fascinating a person as I ever met with in any rank,’ papa added, as he quitted the room ; ‘and it was no small proof of her influence over her husband, that he left his son under the guardianship of his brother, Admiral Scott, and Sir James Elphinstone, rather than of Lord Harborough, her brother (who had just before gone over to the Church of Rome), as the priests who were constantly about him were most urgent he should do. Of course, it remains to be seen what the young man is.’

‘I doubt if Admiral Scott was any great improvement over Lord Harborough,’ observed Tom, after papa had left the room. ‘He is just as much under the influence of priests—of Morton’s, at least, which comes to the same thing—as his brother was, and thwarted and opposed Sir James on every possible point,—when he would have dismissed Morton, for one thing, and when he would have placed some restriction on his ward’s intercourse with the Harboroughs, for another. No doubt Sir James’s guardianship has been an advantage to the place those fourteen years ; but *cui bono* ? No sooner was the majority passed, and Sir James’s term of office expired, than the “restoration” of the chapel was commenced ; and that, no doubt, is only the beginning of a series of “Popish aggres-

sions." Well, it will be hard for papa to see the old place fall a prey to Popish priests, after all he has tried to do for it. But I can't quite bring myself to believe it will really come to that.'

'Of course it won't,' cried Marianne, settling the matter very easily, as she usually did; 'the whole parish isn't Mr. Scott's; and, even if it were, the people aren't. Papists! I should like to see *them* take possession of the place as long as we have papa and Dr. Blackburn to defend it. Oh, you have not seen Dr. Blackburn yet, Ellie? I forgot he came here just as you went away. I wonder if you will like him as well as we do? But to be sure you will; everybody likes him. We feel as if we had known him all our lives, being Dr. Hunter's nephew and altogether, and he is such a darling'—

'Marianne! Marianne!' was laughingly echoed on all sides; while Tom subjoined, 'It's well for you, my young lady, that *somebody* doesn't hear you.'

'Somebody might hear every word I said if he chose,' responded Marianne, with a saucy smile. 'I may admire one gentleman, surely, without any disparagement to another?'

'And no one could help admiring Dr. Blackburn,' said Harriet, with most extraordinary liberality for her (for Harriet was not much given to admire mere personal qualities, unless joined to the solid accompaniments of rank and wealth). 'The only wonder is that he buries himself in this country place, a man with his talents, and after practising in London, too! It is very strange.'

'Perhaps he found London too healthy to suit him, or too public a place to kill off the people,' suggested Tom. 'There's no accounting for some things, Harriet.'

'I thought you knew that it was his uncle's last wish that Dr. Blackburn should succeed him in Colston,' said mama, shaking her head at Tom; 'that is a very natural and sufficient reason, surely.'

'Oh, humbug! he may tell that to the horse marines,' was the polite rejoinder. (Tom's manners were certainly not all that could be desired in those days.) 'He's not such a fool as

that would make him. I don't pretend, of course, to know his reason ; but it's something wide enough from that, you may be sure. And here he comes to speak for himself,' he broke off abruptly, as a gentleman rode up to the door.

'Dr. Blackburn,' said Marianne, in answer to my look of inquiry, as Tom went to the door to greet the new arrival. 'We half expected he would come to-night to arrange about the tea-meeting we wrote you about. Doesn't he look well on horseback ?'

I glanced at Dr. Blackburn as he dismounted and threw the reins over the holly-tree, and confessed, like the Queen of Sheba, that for once description had not exceeded reality. Both horse and rider were thoroughbred.

He was a tall handsome man,—there was no mistake about that,—with fine dark eyes and dark hair, and a look of power, both physical and moral, that was far more striking than any mere symmetry of feature.

I noticed that he had fine broad shoulders, which I specially admire in the lords of the creation ; also, that his beautifully formed mouth (for he *had* a beautiful mouth, only it looked as if it could be sarcastic upon occasion) was not disfigured by either of those modern atrocities—a beard or moustache, which are my especial abominations. Exquisitely trimmed whiskers were the only apparent fopperies in which *he* indulged ; and the frank sweet smile which lighted up his features when he spoke was their greatest charm.

But he was altogether too magnificent-looking to suit me. I knew there could be nothing about me to suit him ; and I took up a piece of work, and withdrew to the window, not caring to wait the introduction.

Dr. Blackburn came into the room in the straightforward way of a man who has no time to throw away, tossed Harry, who had bounded forward to meet him, high up in the air, and then shook hands successively with mama, Harriet, and Marianne. Then, before mama could name me, he turned to me and bowed with a pleasant smile.

‘I don’t think I need to be introduced to Miss Helen,’ he said; ‘I know her already so perfectly through her village friends,—especially one,—Robbie Gourlay.’

I smiled also, and shook hands, of course; but I fear he must have thought me rather shy and cold, for he drew back suddenly, bowed, and immediately withdrew to the table, where the others were still seated; nor did he again notice me by word or look, both of which were now directed to the tray, and Harriet, its presiding genius. He would not allow papa to be disturbed, as it was Friday night, and he could only remain a short time, ‘merely to arrange some little matters of business with Miss Fitz-James,’ he explained, as he took the chair next her and accepted a cup of tea.

Tom withdrew to a side-table, to inspect sundry commissions, in the way of books, paper, etc., which I had been intrusted to execute for him; the others remained at the table to lend their aid in discussing the ‘business.’

‘I called at Woodlands to-day,’ I heard Dr. Blackburn say, in answer to a remark of Harriet’s. ‘Lady Maitland will not be persuaded to take the convenership (she has more than enough to do already, she says, with the bazaar she has on hand); so, as it is not the thing for your mama, you will be compelled to accept your responsibilities, Miss Fitz-James. I have a note from her on the subject, however.’

He handed a little note to Harriet; and while she glanced at its contents, he drank his tea in silence, occasionally flashing an observant glance around, but not speaking till she had done. They looked a handsome pair as they sat thus: she in her soft pink muslin dress, without ornament of any kind, leaning forward on the table, her dark eyes bent on the paper, and her clear creamy cheek contrasting the jetty gloss of her hair, turned simply back and gathered in a coil behind; and he, with his clear-cut handsome features and manly bearing, gravely and kindly looking down at her. (I should say here, perhaps, that the arrangements they were considering were for a parish tea-drinking or *soirée*, which was to be the first of the sort

ever held in Colston, to take place some time in the following month, and which we were all anxious should be a success.)

Harriet passed him the note when she had read it.

'Sir John is so kind,' she said. 'Mama, he offers to send us flowers and strawberries from Woodlands, if we let the gardeners know in time what we shall require. I do hope some other gentleman will come forward also, and not oblige us to tax Sir John too heavily. Well, if Miss Smythe will be our convener (and I am sure she will, she is always so good), Marianne, and Ellie, and the Craufurds, and I, will do our best to assist under her. But, Doctor,' she added with a smile, 'you have not enlisted Ellie yet.'

'I am not forgetting it, Miss Fitz-James ;' and I felt, without raising my eyes, that I was being looked at 'through and through,' to see if I would do, no doubt. Then he came forward to the window where I was sitting.

'I am going to plead for your services, Miss Helen,' he began in a pleasant tone. 'I have a class in our Sabbath school just now, which I should be very sorry to disperse. One of our lady teachers has unexpectedly left us, and there is really no one to take her place, unless you will kindly have compassion upon us and come to our help.'

I was very much taken aback. I knew very well, of course, that my life was not given me only for my own enjoyment, but for many higher and nobler purposes as well ; and I had always intended, as soon as I got home, to begin at once, and try to fulfil these. But I had not expected to be set to work all at once in this particular line, and I shrank very much from the proposal. Teaching was what I had never had any experience in ; and I was sure that as soon as I was set down before a row of faces, young or old, every particle of sense—if I had any—would take flight. No ; I could not do it ; and yet, what was the use of me if I was to throw away every opportunity of doing good, just because it was difficult ? Dr. Blackburn stood patiently waiting my decision, and after hesitating a minute or two, I compromised matters.

‘I will try for an evening or two, Dr. Blackburn,’ I said; ‘and if I don’t succeed, you will let me off, won’t you?’

An expression of pleasure lighted up his fine features, as if I had done him a personal favour.

‘I am not afraid,’ he said; ‘only begin, and you will not wish to leave off. They are very nice intelligent girls, and I think you will get on well together. I thank you very cordially, Miss Helen, both in their name and my own.’

The *soirée* business was then proceeded with, the day fixed, the programme arranged, etc. etc.; while I could not but admire the business-like accuracy and clearness with which, in half the words that would have been used at a ladies’ committee, and without infringing on their especial province of details, Dr. Blackburn allotted the various sums to be expended on this and that particular item, and drew out a concise outline of the whole, which it would be the easiest thing in the world for the committee to fill in. After all, men have the heads for business! Women lose themselves in a maze, which is pervious as daylight to the harder brain of a man.

‘Now,’ said Dr. Blackburn, rising, while he put up his pencil-case, ‘we have laid the train, if only we can carry it out properly. As it is the first thing of the kind we have tried, I hope it will prove a success.’

At this moment Harry appeared before the window, hoop in hand, clamorously calling me to come out and see his white moss-rose tree. I glanced round: the group at the table, including mama, were still discussing ways and means; I should never be missed; so, passing noiselessly from the room, I followed Harry to the garden, where, forgetting all my new dignity as a grown-up young lady, he and I spent the next half-hour in a regular game of romps.

After he was called in to bed I lingered out in the sweet summer twilight, with the moon gleaming down above the trees, and the ripple of the water and the rustle of the corn-fields around sounding clear and distinct in the stillness, feeling how pleasant it was to be at home. It was now nearly ten



o'clock, and all the birds and bees and butterflies had betaken themselves to rest; even the flowers had closed for the night, the snowy petals of the lilies, which were in unusual profusion, gleaming in the moonlight; and the little gardens in the village—which, owing to the deep slope of the garden, I could see quite well from where I stood, and which an hour before had been full of busy life—were all now hushed in repose—the deep and well-earned repose of the night. The stillness and sweet peace of all around, combined with the influence of the hour, touched me inexpressibly, the more so that I had so long been a stranger to the country. My happy childhood's days rose vividly before me, till I could almost see the busy children at work among the flowers as of old, and teasing Robbie Gourlay almost beyond the limits of his patience with their endless fancies and caprices. And earnestly did my heart rise in supplication to the Father of all, that He would lead us all safely along the narrow path leading to Himself, and hedge our way on both sides that we might not stray from it; not with thorns,—ah! not with thorns, unless such was His blessed will,—but with the sweet flowers of goodness and love, and unite us all again in happiness, in His own good time, with our beloved one—our eldest brother, Wilfred, who had gone to the home above seven years before, and whose peaceful resting-place by the side of the church, in the old churchyard, was every day tended with reverent and loving care.

When I went into the house again, half an hour afterwards, the parlour was empty, and Betsy was placing the Bibles on the table, previous to sounding the gong for prayers.

'Well, Ellie, have you renewed acquaintance with all the old places?' said Marianne, coming in and sitting down on the sofa beside me. 'I thought you would rather be by yourself the first night at home, so I did not go out to you after Dr. Blackburn went away. By the way, what do you think of the Doctor, now you have seen him? Did we say a word too much in his praise?'

‘Oh, he seems very pleasant,’ I said, after a moment’s recollection,—the Doctor and his visit seemed very far off in my thoughts at that moment,—‘but you know I can’t tell what I think of him the very first time I have seen him.’

‘Oh, Miss Boarding School!’ cried Marianne, laughing; ‘I might have guessed you would say that.’

‘He is a fine-looking man, at all events,’ said Harriet, who had followed her into the room; ‘even his enemies must admit that.’

‘Oh, of course, he is a most handsome man,’ I assented warmly,—‘any one can see that at a glance; he is more like a Court physician than a country doctor. He is a great deal too grand for me.’

‘That is because you don’t know him, Ellie. You think of his outward appearance, but you don’t know how good and simple-hearted he is in reality; and considering what a great man he is, it is very remarkable. Sir James Simpson and all the great doctors think so much of his opinion—they told papa so; and as for the people here, they just adore him. The great wonder, as Harriet says, is that he buries himself here; but that is for our great advantage. Wait till you know the Doctor a little better, Ellie, and you will change your opinion! I shouldn’t wonder if you were to like him better than any of us yet. Remember, I prophesy that.’

Ay, I did remember!





## CHAPTER III.

### NEW EXPERIENCES.

‘Come into the garden, Maud,  
For the black bat night is past.’



DID not awake next morning till (low be it spoken) nearly nine o'clock ! The first sound I heard was Marianne's voice below the window chanting some *matinée*, and springing out of bed I saw her going round to the garden, with her little basket in her hand, to cut bouquets for the rooms, and also to carry to the hospital at Colmuir End, herself as bright as the morning.

What a delicious dressing I had ! Oh the joy of being free ! No horrid bell for ever clanging in my ear till every one was up and dressed, and then the hurry-scurry down-stairs to be in time for morning class ! Instead of that, a perfect concert of birds outside the window, bees buzzing noisily about, and the warm morning air wafting in the perfume of roses, violets, and all sorts of delights, the window being close to the garden wall. ‘To town who will, a country life for me !’

‘Oh, you have got up, Ellie !’ said Marianne, coming in when I was nearly dressed ; ‘mama would not have you disturbed after all your fatigues this week, and I was going to offer to bring your breakfast ; but I suppose you will be down-stairs presently.’

While I was breakfasting in solitary state, and at the same time telling and hearing all the rest of the news not yet

detailed, our plans for the day were discussed. Mama and Marianne were going with papa to Strathie Manse,—it being the day previous to the Communion, and he was to preach,—returning at night; and Harriet and I decided that we also must have an expedition; that—Tom being agreeable—we would dine early, and then proceed to the Dalmany woods, in quest of ferns. I had some fine specimens in my fernery already, and I wished to add to the collection. Besides, as Mr. Scott was coming down so soon, it would in all likelihood be our last ramble there.

We had just settled the question, when papa came into the room and desired to see my prizes, which I had not had time to exhibit before, and I had to go up-stairs and unpack them and my other treasures. After these, and my drawings and work, had been duly examined and approved, my dresses and other possessions had also to be removed from the trunks, and disposed properly in wardrobe and drawers, with the neatness and precision so constantly inculcated upon me during the last fifteen months, and this occupied all the rest of the morning.

By half-past twelve o'clock, we saw mama, Marianne, and Harry drive away with papa in Mr. Monteith's gig; and then the fates—meaning Tom—being propitious, we had our early dinner, and Harriet and I set out for the woods.

The very day of days it was for such an expedition: the sky not blazing with sunshine, as it had been for some days, but a light fresh breeze blowing, which promised well for our walk. The birds were twittering gaily in the trees as we walked down the 'Manse brae,' and some stray little children from the village, tired and heated with their play, were making the most of their holiday under the cooling shade.

We went first to the village, as I had some little gifts to distribute to my old friends there, and a letter to Aunt Fitz-James to put in the post. This done, after a little chat with Mrs. Gourlay and her daughters, who were enjoying the sunshine, sewing at their cottage door, and a promise that I

would see them for a longer visit in the beginning of the week, we retraced our steps towards Dalmany.

On the bridge we encountered Robbie himself, shouldering his rake (he was the village gardener), his week's labours ended.

'Fine day, leddies,' said he, pulling his forelock by way of salutation. 'Eh, Miss Heelen, is this you? My! but we're glad to get ye hame again.'

'Thank you, Robbie,' said I, as he grasped my offered hand; 'I like to be missed, and I am very glad to be home, and to see you again.'

'Ay, ye wadna see mony places like the bonnie braes o' Colston,' rejoined Robbie complacently. Then, glancing at our botanical cases, 'Ye're for the wuds, I see. I'm misdootin' they'll be gaun to steek the road when ance the Laird comes; he's no' an unconsiderate lad, by a' accounts. But *ye'll* no' need to heed, leddies,' added he politely, and with a sly look at Harriet; 'I'se warrant the Laird'll like to see bonnie leddies in his grunds; it'll be as gude's a flure to him,' he subjoined professionally.

'Mr. Scott might not think so,' said I, smiling, as Harriet's face evinced a very decided refusal of the sufferance allotted for her.

'They're turnin' awfu' gude at Dalmany noo,' Robbie proceeded, with a grin, apparently eager to relieve his mind by imparting the news. 'Ye'll hae heard aboot it, Miss Heelen? The chapel's open ilka mornin' for prayers (onybody can gang that likes), an' then again at nicht, like the very Sabbath day itsel' For my part, I like a gude dose o' the Gospel next my stamach in the mornin' as weel as onybody, but I like aye to get it by the fireside.'

As no answer could be made to this statement, we attempted none, and Robbie went on again.

'They gang three times to the chapel on the Sabbath day,' he added, by way of summing up. 'It's my hope, I'm shure, that it'll no' be, wi' them, "the nearer the kirk, the farrer

frae grace ;” but ’deed, I dinna think there’s muckle grace yonder. I gaed in ae day, jist to say I had seen’t ; an’ o’ a’ the anties ever *I* saw, I think yon Charteris beats them, wi’ his boos, an’ his becks, an’ his carryings on ! They hae can’les burning in the gude sunlicht, an’ a great muckle cross fornent them, an’ a muckle eagle haudin’ up the Book,—jist the highroad to Rome, ye ken. I’ve heard ministers whiles speakin’ o’ the simpleccity o’ the Kirk ! My ! if they wad look in at the chapel ony day, but they wad say *it* was *bairnly*,—a’ booin’, an’ beekin’, an’ geeble-gabblin’ thegither like a wheen bairns at the schule ! I ne’er saw the like o’t in my born days.’

‘Don’t be uncharitable, Robbie,’ said Harriet, smiling ; ‘that is not like you. *We* cannot enter into the meanings of all these things, but *they* can. Other people have minds as well as we, you know. It is only in forms that we differ’—

‘I’m no’ shure o’ that,’ said Robbie sturdily. ‘Charteris was layin’ aff to me aboot thae things the other nicht, when he was ower aboot some roots. “Gourlay,” says he, when he could say nae mair (for mind ye, the wife an’ me gied him his answer ; he hadna’t a’ his ain way), “I wonder a sensible man like you, that reads the Book for yoursel’, doesna see that *we* hae the richts o’t.” “Ay, freend,” says I, “prove that if ye can ; that’s jist the question that has to be settled.” Oo, it’s naething else than Papistrie they’re after,—I aye said it. The last Laird was nae better nor a Papisher in his auld days, whatever he was afore ; an’ I’m misdootin’ this ane’ll be the same (they’re a’ tarred wi’ ae stick, frae the auld Stuart days till the noo). But I’m forgettin’ my manners, keepin’ ye here, leddies, when ye’re for the wuds. If it’s flures ye’re wantin’, Miss Heelen, gang ye up to the glass-hooses yonder, an’ ask Mr. M’Gregor to gie ye some o’ the roses I gied him,—there’s no’ the like o’ them in the country-side. Or if it’s thae things ye’re after’ (pointing to a fern-leaf protruding from my case), ‘gang to the bank by the water-side, fornent the Castel, an’ ye’ll see fine anes ! There’s a paper hingin’ up, biddin’ folk

no' meddle them; but ne'er you heed that—the Laird wad mak' *ye* welcome to the best o' them, I ken that.' And with another pull at his forelock, Robbie took his leave.

'So we have got an introduction to Mr. M'Gregor,—the head-gardener, I suppose,' said Harriet, laughing, as we again proceeded on our way. 'I'm afraid even that would stand us in little stead if we ventured to touch the placarded ferns.'

'Good Robbie, he has done his utmost to oblige us,' I said, smiling also. 'If Dalmany were his, we should be welcome to the best it contained. It's a pity the power to give doesn't always go with the will.'

'What did you think of his floral compliment?' said Harriet, laughing. 'I doubt if Mr. Scott could say anything as good.'

I did not doubt it, as I looked at her, in her thick white morning-dress and grey garden-hat, her dark eyes sparkling with animation, and a colour in her cheek delicate as the hue of the pink shell. I thought she might inspire any one as well as Robbie.

The 'Dalmany Road,' as the village people call the avenue, opens right opposite the Manse glebe. It is nearly two miles in length, and is shut in on both sides by wide-spreading oaks, which keep the sun's rays at a safe distance, forming a sort of 'dim religious light,' almost like that of a cathedral, which is very pleasant. About midway along, the 'Castle' stands conspicuous on a bright and velvet slope, overhanging the river, and looking across in stately majesty on the public road. It is quite a ruin, with beautiful woodland peeps from all its little pigeon-holes of windows; and over the great doorway is still apparent the half-defaced cross, with the inscription in black-letter, 'This I'll uphold,' which forms the armorial bearings of the chiefs of Dalmany. (It had belonged for some time to Queen Mary herself, and was by her restored to the old Earl of Colston, one of her most trusted adherents, he having forfeited it for some political misdemeanour in the previous reign.) The whole place has peculiarly the air of 'a

home of the past,' and sends the thoughts hundreds of years back to the time when it was the scene of a Court,—when the foot of the beautiful queen pressed the soft and velvet sward, and when those who then acted so conspicuous and turbulent a part 'in their country's story' lived and moved here. I remember as a child I never passed under its grim shadow without dreading to see a knight in complete armour issue from the postern-door and challenge me for presuming to intrude on his domains.

The chapel (St. Mary's, as I ought to call it), phoenix-like risen from its own ruins, stands just beside the Castle ; and, I daresay, it must have been a very pleasant walk for such of the village folks as 'liked to gang' to morning prayers,—only, I think that, like Robbie, I would prefer prayers at home.

We saw no one as we passed through the lodge-gates, and sauntered, case in hand, up the noble avenue, our steps almost dancing under the grand old oaks—older far than the century—that made Dalmany famous, and starting from their repose at every step countless young hares and pheasants.

'Well, it must give one a feeling of consequence to live in a place like this,' said Harriet, as we looked through the framework of leaves and blossoms on the noble expanse of park and lawn, with the river sweeping round it, and the graceful fallow deer every now and then bounding about, or peeping out from amongst the trees.

'And to know it was your *own*,' responded I, 'and that you were descended from the knights and crusaders of old ! Oh, Harriet, there would be no bounds to your felicitation if all this were yours ! You would be haughtier than Lady Elphinstone herself, I do believe,' I added, laughing.

'Thank you, Ellie ; I am not quite so silly as that, I hope,' she said, in not a very well-pleased tone. 'But we are forgetting our ferns—see, there is a beauty ! I must secure it.'

We strolled along, picking now a wild-flower, now a fern, till we found ourselves at the water-side. A wild but picturesque place was this—a perfect forest of ferns of every variety,



their pretty cut leaves aromatising the air. High banks, or rather cliffs, towered on one side of the path; below, on the other side, stretched the river, a broad gleam of silver in the distance; while a deep hollow, or rather ravine, formed by the dry bed of a mountain stream, and full of large rocky stones, lay between the banks, and was spanned by a rustic bridge. Farther up, to the right side, the old Castle frowned down upon us in gloomy state; and a flight of noisy rooks, wheeling with incessant caw overhead, testified their annoyance at our presence by croaking most vociferously.

‘I do believe,’ cried Harriet, looking up to the top of the cliff, ‘there are the famous ferns. I am sure I see something white away up there. Come, Ellie! we shall scramble up and have a look at them.’

This, however, I did not fancy; the ascent seemed difficult, almost perpendicular, in fact, and I was rather tired now, and inclined for a rest. Besides, I did not care to take so much trouble merely to look at ferns I could not take. I began a remonstrance, but she did not hear me, as she was already some way up the ascent; so I sat down on the smooth turf, and began arranging my treasures,—Harriet now and then smiling down to me, and waving her handkerchief. When I had accomplished this, I amused myself by throwing pebbles into the water, and watching the circles widen and widen till they vanished altogether, leaving the surface smooth as a mirror.

I had just picked up a large one for this purpose when I was startled by a scream, coming, I thought, from the top of the bank. I sprang to my feet, and looked round in all directions, fear quickening my sight. ‘Harriet!’ I called loudly; no one answered. The paper still fluttered in the breeze, her parasol and basket lay on the turf, but she was nowhere to be seen.

‘Where are you?’ I screamed; and, without waiting for an answer, as a thought struck me, and scarce conscious what I did, I rushed up the bank. I knew she must have fallen into

the ravine ; and how was I to reach her ? I gained the top, and looked eagerly for a path or descent of some kind. Fortunately some rude steps had been cut in the almost perpendicular cliff ; and though at any other time I should have shrunk from such a descent, now, impelled by necessity, and dreading I knew not what, I almost ran down. Harriet lay at the bottom, amid a heap of stones and *débris*, motionless, and, as I thought, fainting. In a moment I was beside her, leaning over her, gazing at her. She opened her eyes when I spoke to her, in a very languid manner.

‘Don’t touch me, Ellie,’ she implored, in a voice as feeble. ‘I am bruised all over,—my shoulder, and my arm, and my foot,—I think they are all broken ;’ and she closed her eyes again, as if she were indeed about to faint.

This was a dreadful predicament, considering that we were two miles from home, and that it was most unlikely we should be seen by passers-by. What *was* to be done ? She could not be left there. I could not carry her—that was equally certain ; but what could I do ? Two alternatives only presented themselves. Could I leave her alone while I hastened to the village for some sort of conveyance (which, after all, would be a matter of time and difficulty) ? or should I make my way at once to the house, and ask assistance from the housekeeper ? I chose the latter as the more expeditious of the two, though in other circumstances it would have been the last expedient I would have thought of. We had none of us, in any of our rambles, ever before approached nearer the house than we were now. The servants being most of them English, or else foreigners, and under Mr. Charteris’s jurisdiction, no duty took even papa there ; and I very much disliked the idea of going there now. But of course I had no choice.

Hastily dipping my handkerchief in the little streamlet which trickled gently over the stones in the middle of the ravine, I bathed her forehead with the cooling liquid ; and, having loosened her hat and jacket, and made my own jacket into a cushion for her head, and assuring her that I

should be back in a very few minutes, I hasted off on my errand.

On reaching the bank once more, I chose a little path branching off to the right, which I thought must lead towards the house. I walked fast till I reached the avenue, when I quickened my pace to a run. Emerging from the shade of the trees into a large open space near the house, I debated to which side to turn, warned by certain barking and neighing sounds that I was not quite in the right direction for human sympathy, when I became aware of two figures approaching from the stables, followed by a bounding, barking troop of dogs. 'Some of the gamekeepers,' I thought, as I gladly advanced; 'they will take me to the house.' But on a nearer approach, I at once perceived they were unmistakably gentlemen. A second survey convinced me that one of them was old Admiral Scott of Hainslie (Lady Elphinstone's brother); who the other was, I was at no loss to guess,—young, handsome, distinguished, and with a certain lord-of-the-manor air,—who could it be but the owner of the domain into which we had so unwarrantably intruded? My face burned, and for the moment I actually forgot Harriet as I looked eagerly for some out-gate or pathway through which I might disappear; but there was none—nothing but unbroken lines of hedge, widening considerably, however, as they approached the walls; and I was in hopes, if I made a wide circuit, I might escape unnoticed. Vain expectation! The old gentleman recognised me, I saw, and encounter them I must. Here was a situation! Jacketless, gloveless, breathless,—my white dress all soiled and wet—my face flushed with the heat and the speed at which I had come—flurried, nervous, agitated to the last degree,—I must have made a spectacle!

'Miss Fitz-James!' said the old gentleman, holding out his hand, and surveying me somewhat quizzically (no wonder!), while his companion, raising his hat, sauntered on; 'I cannot flatter myself that you were coming to welcome me.'

‘I—I thought you were in London,’ stammered I, bluntly enough, no doubt.

‘I don’t doubt that, else I should not have had this pleasure. But,’ added he kindly, with a second glance at me, ‘is anything amiss?’

I had now in some degree recovered my self-possession at least, and in a few words told him what had happened, and that I was on my way to ask assistance at the house. His face changed at once.

‘Reginald,’ he called quickly to his companion, ‘here has been an accident,—a young lady has fallen from the cliff at the water’s edge, and is seriously hurt, I fear. You must order the carriage to follow us at once, and some of the men, and I will go on with Miss Fitz-James.’

‘No serious injury, I hope?’ said the younger gentleman, turning to me.

‘I hope not, but I am not sure,’ I answered hurriedly, feeling very anxious to get back to Harriet, for she might have fainted, or anything might have occurred in my absence.

‘Then bring the carriage quickly, Reginald,’ said the Admiral, ‘and follow us to the ravine;’ and the gentleman (whoever he might be), again raising his hat, hastened in the direction of the stables, while I retraced my steps to the ravine, followed more slowly by the Admiral.

We found Harriet in the same position in which I had left her,—still lying on the rough stones, from which I had been unable to move her, her eyes closed, and her dark hair, which my awkwardness had unloosed, streaming about her pale face. Any one looking at her from where we were descending would have thought she was dead; for one terrible moment I thought so myself.

‘No, no,’ said the Admiral, in answer to my terrified look, ‘she has only fainted; and we shall have assistance immediately,—they would follow us at once.’

Assistance did arrive almost immediately, in the person of my young and handsome acquaintance (I was not yet sure of

his name) and four or five men-servants, who came down the bank with the agility of chamois, bearing various appliances,—such as water, a flask of some liquor, etc.,—as I could see. This gentleman, on seeing the state of matters, at once went forward and dashed some of the water that had been brought on Harriet's face. This was repeated once or twice without much apparent effect; but at length the eyes unclosed, and rested with a bewildered gaze on the strange faces that bent anxiously over her. A few drops of brandy which he succeeded in forcing between her lips still further revived her, and she was able to answer a question or two that were put to her as to how she felt.

‘She is all right now,’ said the Admiral, turning to me, his relieved and warm tone proving that he had not previously felt quite assured of this result. ‘We must consider how to remove her, Reginald; she must not remain longer here.’

‘The carriage is at the top of the bank,’ said the gentleman addressed, with a look of deep concern and interest. ‘If she can bear the motion, we will carry her there now.’ And he again bent over Harriet and repeated the question.

The servants had brought with them a French portable chair, capable of being turned into a kind of litter when required, and provided with cushions and all necessary accompaniments for an invalid's comfort; and this was now brought forward. Harriet, however, shrank sensitively from being touched, and attempted, with my assistance, to get up herself; but the effort brought back the faintness, and she would have fallen had not the gentleman caught her in his arms, and, with the utmost care and gentleness, placed her on the litter. And (himself assisting) she was carried to the carriage, and laid on the cushions, as comfortably as in an easy chair. The Admiral and I were shut in along with her, and we drove off at a very slow pace to avoid jolting; while the other gentleman, saying he would apprise those at home of our coming, disappeared across the park.

It had all happened so suddenly, it looked like a dream.

Scarcely two hours ago, sitting tranquilly on the bank, arranging our flowers and looking idly out on the shining water ; and now ! What would poor Nurse say when she saw us coming home like this ? She would be in a pretty state, I knew.

‘Mr. Scott sent off at once for the Doctor,’ observed the Admiral soothingly, as he kindly wrapped the great fur-coverings closer about Harriet. ‘I have no doubt he will arrive at the Manse almost as soon as we.’

Mr. Scott ! It *was* he, then ! There was no room for further doubt. What a horrible, horrible *rencontre* it was altogether ! But it was no time to indulge these reflections then. I noticed that Harriet’s paleness visibly increased. The motion of the carriage, easy as it was, appeared to hurt her a good deal ; and I was truly glad when we at last drove through the lodge-gates, down to the ‘brig-end,’ then up the ‘Manse brae’ and the little approach to the house, drawing up with a grand commotion before the door.

‘Here we are,—and expected, I see. All right,’ said the Admiral, as the servant let down the steps.

Nurse and Betsy, with scared and terrified faces, stood within the door, looking eagerly out, and evidently restrained from shrieking only by the presence of the stranger gentleman (our young chevalier), who, as I had half expected, was there also. He came forward as the carriage stopped, and, putting aside the servants, again carefully and gently lifted Harriet in his arms, and carried her up-stairs to the drawing-room sofa, Nurse pioneering the way. Poor girl ! it must have been most disagreeable to have so many strangers about her ; but I don’t suppose she noticed them much. (She told me afterwards that she had felt stunned and faint, and could see nothing,—fortunately for her, I would almost say,—and only desired to be let alone ; though this, of course, was just what could not be.) The transition, too, from one place to another, notwithstanding all the care and gentleness of her bearers, had hurt her much.

I felt in a most embarrassing position,—Harriet in the state she was, quite incapable of giving any directions, and no one to act but myself. Nurse was never equal to an emergency like this, and could do nothing but wring her hands and lament; Betsy, ditto. Nor did the presence of the two gentlemen at all add to my comfort. I did wish they would withdraw; and, turning to them, I thanked them very much for all their kind attention, etc. etc., and begged they would not longer detain themselves, etc. I addressed the Admiral, but his young relative answered for him. ‘We cannot leave you alone, Miss Fitz-James’ (I wondered what assistance he thought he was giving me). ‘We must be allowed to remain, at least until the Doctor arrives, which I hope will be presently.’ This proposal was warmly seconded by the Admiral; and of course there was nothing for it but to submit with as good a grace as possible.

It was not long before the Doctor’s ring was heard at the bell and his rapid steps ascended the stairs. A most welcome relief to me! Embarrassment first, however, as it proved. He came into the room without noticing the strangers, and had advanced half-way to the sofa when his eye fell on Mr. Scott, who stood in the shade of the window. Then, *what* a change came over the spirit of the scene! It seemed to be a day of startling *rencontres*. I had not believed it possible that any event in life would have moved Dr. Blackburn from his self-possession; but at that moment he stood not only motionless but transfixed to the spot, as if he had received a blow, while a look passed between them such as no strangers could give each other.

It was a glance of thrilling recognition, and evidently most unwelcome surprise, on both sides, and seemed to astonish the Admiral not less than it did me; for the one flushed so violently, while the other became so suddenly and deadly pale, that it was impossible not to remark it. The next instant they had bowed to each other, as I could fancy two duellists might have done over their weapons, and then Dr. Blackburn

came forward to the sofa. He shook hands with me politely, and with no trace of the momentary *émeute*, whatever its cause, either in his countenance or manner, unless for his continued and deathlike paleness. Then he turned to Harriet.

‘Miss Fitz-James,’ he said, in his kind, pleasant voice, which seemed to carry heart and encouragement in its very tone, ‘I little thought last night that *you* would so soon be my patient. Let us hope it is nothing very bad.’

After a brief examination he ordered her to be carried to her room, whispering at the same time to me,—

‘Go also, please, Miss Helen ; and be very careful how you remove the dress—perhaps you may have to cut part of it. She must be touched very gently.’

Nurse wheeled the sofa out of the room, Betsy and I following. The Admiral had gone out a minute before to give some order to his servants, and the two young men were left alone in the drawing-room.

Returning a few minutes afterwards to summon Dr. Blackburn, I found them standing together in the great bow-window, haughtily confronting each other, with the self same glance I had noticed before, both so absorbed in what they were talking of that they did not even hear me enter ; but the words that met my ear arrested me on the threshold

‘On your honour as a gentleman?’ I heard the Doctor say, in a tone of stern interrogation (I could hardly have believed his pleasant voice capable of such a tone).

‘On my honour, I repeat most emphatically, No,’ was the reply, in the haughty accents of the other.

‘Then I accept your denial ; I am sorry I made the accusation,’ said Dr. Blackburn, still in a constrained tone, but at the same time offering his hand, which, after an instant’s hesitation, the other took. There was a second’s pause ; and then, with the same lofty courtesy that had passed between them before, Mr. Scott took leave. That roused me, and I had but just time to start aside behind an open door, when he came out of the room. I doubt if he would have seen me



even had I stood in his way. Something had perturbed him strangely—I saw that at a glance. His face, that had been pale before, was deeply flushed ; excitement, embarrassment, resentment also, and some other feeling, were strangely mingled there, and he walked down-stairs with the air of a man in a dream.

Here was a curious circumstance enough, but it was no time to ponder it then ; I must go in and let the Doctor know we were ready.

I found him still standing in the window, but evidently not looking out. The very listlessness of the attitude showed how far away his thoughts were ; and from the very first glimpse I caught of his face, I saw that it had changed terribly within the last few minutes, and that it wore an expression of anxiety, pain—almost anguish—which had been strangers there before. It shocked me so that I could not even speak ; and I was turning to leave the room noiselessly as I had entered, when he heard the movement, and in an instant had checked back all symptoms of emotion, and met me as calmly as if he had only been studying the flowers the while.

‘Ready for me, Miss Helen ?’

Such riddles men are ! I don’t suppose even their nearest and dearest ever find out half their hidden depths. I’m sure I shouldn’t like to have ‘black holes’ in *my* mind that everybody might not see into if they chose.

I admired his demeanour with Harriet, if I had never admired him before—so energetic, firm, and yet so gentle. Standing near, or looking at him, you saw at once that he was ‘nae ’prentice hand, nae journey-wark,’ but one you might safely trust with your life, or even to cut off a limb and put it on again, if he undertook to do it.

The injuries he pronounced to be only bruises,—severe enough, certainly, owing to the height from which she had fallen, but happily nothing more serious, as he had at first been rather apprehensive of. It had been a most providential escape, considering the great rough stones—all covered over

with sand and weeds, as they were—that she had fallen upon ; and the Doctor could hardly at once satisfy himself that the consequences were so slight. The whole system, however, had sustained a shock—the wonder was that it was no worse. Both foot and arm had received a twist, very slight, but still a twist, which must be set right at once. Some assistance, however, was necessary for this, and Nurse was called forward. Poor body ! her spirit is always willing, but she trembled so much that she could not steady herself, much less Harriet.

‘This will never do,’ said the Doctor, looking round in despair ; ‘we must be perfectly steady.’

He looked at Betsy ; but Betsy had already retreated, as far as circumstances and the limits of the room would admit. He turned appealingly to me.

‘Would you try ?’ he asked, evidently half anticipating, half deprecating a refusal.

I was no whit better than the others ; I felt myself shaking in every limb. But of course I wasn’t going to let him see my weakness, and have him fancying all women alike silly ; so I came bravely forward (outwardly, that is) and took hold of the injured arm with both my hands, as I was directed. The Doctor performed his work with great skill and tenderness, I thought ; and as Harriet lay perfectly quiet and passive, too sick and faint almost to look up, the operation was soon completed.

‘Thank you, Miss Helen,’ he said, when it was over ; ‘you have been very brave. Firmness and courage displayed at the right time are the best tests of feeling, to my mind.’

I was very much pleased at the compliment. I am not ashamed to own it—it was pleasanter to me than all the fine things Dean S—— had said at the examination, when he presented to me the gold medal of the school. But it must have sounded like a reflection upon Nurse (though I am sure he did not mean it so), for she hung her head, and seemed so much hurt that I was sorry for her, poor body ! Somehow, with all his pleasantness, there was something about Dr.

Blackburn,—I can't describe it, but I felt it (and I feel it yet, sometimes),—something about the decided curve of his mouth, and in those deep unfathomable eyes of his, which made one terribly ashamed of showing any little weakness in his presence. He seemed so thoroughly to believe in you,—that you were rational, trustworthy, with the ordinary use of your hands, and so forth,—that you felt you *must* keep up your character, and could not give way before him.

Harriet lay now in comparative ease; and very lovely she looked, like the enchanted Beauty in Nurse's fairy tale, with her dark hair falling out from below her cap, and the long-fringed eyelashes resting on the alabaster cheek, as if they had been painted there. I am sure the Doctor thought so, for he looked at her earnestly as he drew the coverlet about her; and he would have been less than man if he had not. She looked up just as he was going away, and held out her hand to bid him good-bye.

'Thank you, Doctor; you have made me all right again,' she said, with a smile that I am sure rewarded him for all his trouble.

'Not quite,' he said, pressing the little hand kindly in both his own. 'You must rest for a few days, and then I hope you will be all right. I shall look in again in the evening. Good-bye.'

I accompanied him to the door, he impressing upon me the necessity there was for perfect quiet in the house for a day or two, till all risk of fever should be past, and stood for a few minutes at the door, looking out, and trying to cool my hot cheeks. When I went in, Nurse was waiting for me in the parlour, eager to hear the particulars of our day's adventure, as well as to detail her own share of it, winding up with,—

'An' yon's the young Laird, Miss Heelen! Weel, to think that! It was easy to see he was a lord, or next door till't; but we didna ken richt whae he was till the flunkies tell't us. He cam' doon frae Lunnon late last nicht, an' took them a' by surprise, for they werena expectin' him or next week: it was a blessin' they were a' ready for him. An' he's a gallant-

lookin' young gentleman, an' a pleesant-spoken, for a' sae prood as he's ca'ed; an' he's as muckle ta'en up wi' Miss Harrit as the very Doctor hissel.'

'Do you think the Doctor so very much taken up about her?' I asked (for which most silly question I could have beaten myself the next moment).

Nurse gave her head a disdainful little toss, as if in utter scorn of my greenness. 'Onybody wi' half an e'e may see that; an' he's no' his lane aither. An' speakin' o' that, Miss Heelen, did ye see hoo queer the Laird an' him lookit at ane anither the day, whan the Doctor cam' into the room? My! if I didna think the Doctor was to fa' doon through the flure! Do ye think it could be a' jist pure anger at seein' ilk ither here? They're queer cratur, men; but, dear me! I'm shure I hope they're no' gaun to cast oot aboot Miss Harrit, puir thing, an' her no' fit to steer.'

I laughed outright at that. 'Oh, Nurse, what an idea! Mr. Scott never even saw Harriet in his life before, nor she him; so how could he cast out about her?'

'He saw her the day,' said Nurse sturdily, and with a look of superior wisdom. 'The flunkies tell't us that he was jist awfu' ta'en up about her. It's weel kent men are jist like bairns whiles; they'll tak' a notion into their heid in less than nae time, an' nae poo'r on airth 'll pit them off't again; an'—depend on't, that's jist it—ye ken the Doctor couldna be very weel pleased to think the Laird got carryin' her up the stair, an' a' the rest o't, an' him no' there ava. It's weel to be young an' bonnie, Miss Heelen: gin it had been an auld, ill-faured body like me, they wadna be sae keen o' carryin' me here an' carryin' me there.'

'Such nonsense you do talk, Nurse!' said I, in polite allusion to this last assertion, but Nurse took no heed.

'I'll no' say but what I like the Doctor's looks the best,' she went on; 'he's no' sae awfu' high, an' he's as muckle o' a gentleman, every bit o' him, though he hasna as muckle siller. The Laird's like a' the Scotts; he kens fine whae he is, for a'

his plesant speakin': but maybe Miss Harriet'll like that best — But bless my heart,' she broke off suddenly, 'what am I aboot claverin' here, when the bairn's her lane, an' maybe wantin' something!' and she bustled off to Harriet, leaving me to my own meditations, which were by no means the most agreeable.

The more I thought over the occurrences of the day, the more my cheek burned with mortification and annoyance, to think of our actually having had to apply to the proprietor of the domain to convey us out of his grounds, into which we had no business to intrude,—our very baskets and cases filled with the flowers and ferns to which we had helped ourselves. Oh, it was humiliating! I clasped my hands on my tingling cheeks at the recollection, and I knew that mama and papa would be no less annoyed when they heard of it. However, it could not be helped now. And Mr. Morton! I felt inclined to transfer my whole burden of annoyances to his account. Why, when it was himself who had introduced the subject, had he not frankly told me that he expected Mr. Scott to arrive that same evening? What possible reason could he have for making a mystery about that? For now I came to think of it, I was convinced that he had been in town the previous day for no other purpose than to meet his principal, and he might as well have said so. He certainly was a strange being, and with no sort of 'method in his madness,' so far at least as I could see.

My thoughts next wandered, by a very natural association, to the meeting I had witnessed that day between my two new acquaintances,—both equally strangers to me,—and the strange, unexplained connection that seemed to exist between them. That they should have met before in the course of their lives, and in the wide world of London, where both must have spent a considerable part of them, was not surprising; but there was something decidedly 'queer,' as Nurse had said, in the mode of their recognition,—the look that had passed between them, the strange words I had overheard,—which

evidently involved much more than mere acquaintance. I could not forget Dr. Blackburn's sudden and deathlike paleness, and how his hand had trembled when it touched mine. Surely it could be no light matter that had shaken *him* thus? But as thinking on this subject did not tend to throw any light upon it, I tried to banish it for the present, though that was by no means easy to do.

Nurse's surmises, or indeed assertions, as to the motives and intentions of the two gentlemen, next recurred to me, with a most involuntary smile. I could not quite subscribe to the idea of Mr. Scott having been subjugated so suddenly, even by 'Miss Harrit;' but I thought there might be some likelihood as to the Doctor, and I sat for some time idly speculating what Harriet's feelings might be in regard to him.

It was now nearly five o'clock; and what a long, strange day it had seemed! I could hardly realize that it was indeed my first day at home. Already it seemed an age since I had left school; and though it was in reality only three days, yet I was conscious of a change both in feeling and idea (I could not define it, but I felt it), even in that short period, which made me feel considerably more 'grown-up' than I had done a week ago.

I then went up-stairs to see after Harriet; and finding that she had fallen asleep after all her fatigues, and that Nurse had darkened the room, and left the door a little ajar that she might hear when she wanted anything, I came down again and spent the next hour in wandering about the garden and glebe, visiting favourite old nooks and play-places with a delicious sense of freedom and leisure, all the more enjoyable that it had been unknown to me for many months past.

Six o'clock brought Tom in from the long walk he usually indulged in every Saturday afternoon, and (after Harriet had been duly attended to) right glad he and I both were to sit down to tea, tired with our long day's rambling.

'So you've made the Laird's acquaintance quickly enough,' was Master Tom's comment, when the news of the day had

been duly detailed to him. 'You've stolen a march on all the other folks hereabouts. I met Sir John near Slateford, and he didn't seem even to know that he had come down.'

'He came late last night, and quite unexpectedly, I believe,' I said; 'but it was all accident our making his acquaintance. I don't suppose we shall see much of him after this.'

'You must please yourselves as to that—and he too, I suppose,' observed Tom coolly, helping himself liberally to bread and jam. 'If there's any good between you, it's likely you'll want to see each other again some time, surely.'

I made him laugh heartily, telling him Robbie's opinion of the chapel, as well as of things in general, which interested Tom more than anything about Mr. Scott.

'Robbie expects no good from Mr. Scott's coming down,' he said,—'and so far as report goes, there is no ground to expect it; but as to the chapel, he needn't trouble his head about that—it won't take many of the Colstonians over to Rome, I'll be bound for that. All the "swells" go, of course (except one or two), as they are safe to do wherever there's foppery or flummery to be had, and all the idle women that want something new to occupy their heads; but all the decent, common-sense men and women that have minds of their own will keep to the old Church, as their fathers did before them, and it will be long before *they* "go over the border."'

'Not if Mr. Scott can help it, apparently,' I could not help saying,—the chapel and its accompaniments had impressed me too disagreeably. 'He seems to be doing his best to get them over; and you know, as Miss Smythe is always lamenting, the spirit of the age is in his favour.'

'Stuff! Much she knows about "the spirit of the age"' (this was a subject always sure to rouse Tom almost as fiercely as it did Robbie, as I very well knew); '"the spirit of the age" is *not* in favour of Popery, I can tell you that. It is against all "sound doctrine," sure enough, but it is more in favour of no religion at all than of an antiquated and exploded one. If you had visited among the mill people at Colmair

End as much as I have done, you would know that. However, the old Scottish spirit is not dead yet, though it may be asleep. "There's life in the old dog yet"—he only needs to be roused.'

'To show his teeth?'

'Yes; it is safer to "let sleeping dogs lie." But, after all, it's not Scott we should bark at so much. According to Sir John, he's a decent, gentlemanly enough fellow in his own way, if he didn't keep such a rascally set about him—Morton, and that Charteris, who, I've a good notion, is something more than an English priest—'

'A Popish one?' I cried in horror. 'Why don't you say it out then at once, and expose him? Why would you let such a man remain in the place another day?'

Tom laughed outright. 'You are always absurd, you girls. Are you really wise enough to believe, Ellie, that you can drive a man away from a place just because he happens to think differently from you? Stuff! the days are past for that, and it's well they are. At the same time, I don't like a man to sham in my very face, and pretend to be one thing when I know just as well that he means another; and I would like amazingly to tell Charteris some day that *I know him*. I'll do it, too.'

'And what if you are mistaken?'

Tom laughed again. 'I'm not mistaken, Mrs. Ellie. But don't fancy I'm going to make a row,—that wouldn't pay, by any means, as the man's not likely to own to anything of the sort till it suits his own purposes to do so. Besides, he's got no weight in the place; the people only laugh at him—none of them would have anything to do with him if they could help it. I know that; so he can't do much harm, at all events.'

There was no use in further demonstrating my views on the subject in the present company, as Tom would have thought it beneath his dignity to 'argufy' with a girl, so I prudently reserved my opinion, and talked of other matters.



Dr. Blackburn came again about half-past nine o'clock, and pronounced Harriet much better than could possibly have been expected after such a fall, and that in a short time he hoped she would be quite well again, though, he added, she would be confined to her room for several days on account of the bruises. It was quite wonderful that she had got over it so easily—simply providential.

He did not remain above five minutes, as he had not half completed his evening 'rounds,' and, soon after he had left, a servant arrived from Dalmany with a basket of splendid hot-house fruit and flowers, and bringing 'Mr. Scott's compliments, and particular inquiries in regard to Miss Fitz-James.' Mr. Scott had certainly not been wanting in all needful attentions.

Our home party arrived shortly afterwards, having spent a most enjoyable day with Mr. and Mrs. Monteith, and two clergymen from Edinburgh. They had met the Doctor near Colmuir End, who had told them of the accident, and reassured them as to the nature of the injuries, so that they were not alarmed about Harriet. Of course, the particulars had all to be gone over again for their benefit. My *rencontre* with the two gentlemen seemed to amuse them extremely—to my no small indignation. Even mama, who had visited and satisfied herself as to Harriet, could laugh as well as the others at the abruptness of the 'introduction.'

'They would easily see you were not aware they had come down,' said mama, somewhat to my relief; 'and the road has been almost a thoroughfare for the last dozen years, so there was nothing extraordinary in your being in the grounds. It was only unfortunate that your walk should have ended as it did.'

'I think I can see Ellie looking round in desperation for some corner to escape,' cried Marianne, with her merry laugh. 'What a look of dignity she would put on when she was obliged to go forward and face them! I wish I could have had a peep.'

'I wish indeed that you had been there instead of me,'

said I, recalling my haste and heat, and altogether ; ‘there was little dignity about me, truly !’

She was disappointed I could tell her so little about Mr. Scott himself,—how he looked, what he said, and whether he was likely to prove a pleasant acquaintance. I really did not know. Two new acquaintances in one day had been too much for my powers of observation, and somehow the Doctor had quite eclipsed the Laird in my attention. As for Harriet, she could tell still less, as she had scarcely even seen him.

Nurse, however, had been more observant ; and from her Marianne received details to her heart’s content, down even to ‘the beautifullest diamond ring’ he wore on his finger, together with sundry wise reflections and predictions, such as I had previously been favoured with.

We had a good laugh over Nurse’s airy castles as we were going to bed that night,—first shutting the door carefully, that no one might hear (for Harriet’s room adjoined ours, and mama’s and papa’s was not far off).

‘Well, success to the Doctor, say I ! I think I like him the better of the two,’ I said ; ‘but do you really think there is anything in it ?’

‘In what ? that the Doctor is a special admirer of Harriet ? No, I don’t, any more than that he is an admirer of mine, or of any one else,—at least, not in the sense Nurse means. You would think all the young men in the country were in love with “Miss Harrit,” to hear Nurse. And how she does bemoan and lament over “poor Mr. Stewart Farquharson, that’s just breakin’ his heart for her” ! she is right enough, I daresay, about *him*. The Doctor is not a man of that sort.’

‘Why not ? he is quite a young man.’

‘Well, I don’t know ; but Dr. Blackburn always gives me the impression of a man who is preoccupied in some way,—either engaged to some one already, or who has had some great disappointment to close up his heart. I could never fancy Dr. Blackburn making love to any one (*now*, of course, I mean ; I don’t know what he may have been), his manner is always

so fatherly somehow,—the same to all young ladies alike, as if he were far above all that sort of thing. It would take an extraordinary person, I should say, to make an impression on *him*.'

I was inclined, however, to credit Nurse's penetration more than Mariaune's; making allowance also for certain little feminine jealousies natural in the circumstances,—she being also a beauty, and very much admired and sought after, though in a less degree than Harriet.

'He seems very pleasant,' I said, after a pause. I had considerably altered my opinion of the Doctor since the previous night. Marianne, however, was too intent on what she was saying to notice the sudden change.

'Oh, he is *very* pleasant, but just odd. Fancy his choosing to take Mrs. Anderson or some other old lady down to supper, at a party where there were plenty of old gentlemen to do the agreeable to them, and lots of young ladies that would have suited him better!'

'Miss Marianne Fitz-James, for instance?'

'Well, she for one, and the Elphinstones, and Craufurds, and Harriet, and a dozen besides,—some of them the loveliest girls from Edinburgh. But that is what he always does, even at a dancing-party. He is sure to pick out the oldest, plainest-looking person in the room, or the very youngest, that nobody else is paying any attention to, and keeps by her the whole evening, as if she were the most delightful company in the world. It is really very aggravating,' broke off May, with a laugh, 'for the Doctor is one of the best dancers I know.'

'I think it is very chivalrous of him,' I cried warmly. 'He knows that all the attractive young ladies get plenty of attention without him; but the poor "wall-flowers" would have little chance of enjoying themselves if everybody was equally selfish. I like Dr. Blackburn for that.'

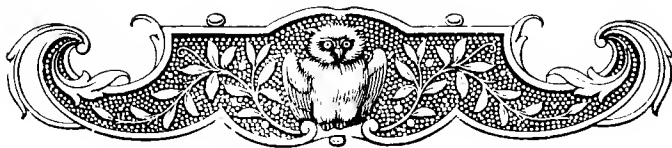
'I'm not so sure, though, that it is altogether philanthropy,' returned Marianne, tossing her long hair, with a saucy smile. 'I think it's just to save himself the trouble of being enter-

taining. I've seen him more than once, when old Colonel Craufurd or Mrs. Anderson thought he was listening intently to some of their long stories, go off into the very brownest of brown studies, and look as dismal as if he had given somebody a dose of arsenic by mistake the day before ; and I've seen him look—not so very different when I've been speaking to him myself. He's the strangest man altogether ! I don't believe he takes a real, thorough interest in any one thing, except working in the parish ; but you would be astonished at all he does there. And the people adore him ! You see, most of them have been in his hands (there are always accidents happening at these mills or on the railway), and he does them good in all ways. They don't think there is another such man on the face of the earth. And oh, how Mr. Morton hates him for that same popularity ! I think that if he could do the Doctor some evil, he would gladly do it ; and his Church would hold him quite justified in doing it.'

'It is a good thing for papa that he takes such an interest in parish work,' I said after a pause. 'Colston is becoming almost a town now, with all these mills ; and it will never do to let Mr. Charteris have it all his own way.'

'No,' said Marianne, taking up her Bible, as a hint that we had talked long enough for a time. And we turned to our evening reading and prayers, and soon after were fast asleep.





## CHAPTER IV.

### SABBATH.

‘Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright.’



HE next day was Sabbath, sweet and peaceful, as Sabbath in the country always is—a great contrast to the Sabbaths I had been used to of late, amid the noise and bustle of London streets. I was awakened early by the sun shining in upon me, and by the birds twittering busily in the lilac-tree that overshadowed our window from the garden. I got up, and, dressing noiselessly, that I might not disturb Marianne, I went as quietly downstairs, and Nurse, who seemed to be the only person moving as yet, came from the kitchen, and let me out to enjoy the sweetness of the summer morning, and the concentrated essence of the trees and flowers, which is never so pure or so exhilarating as in those early hours. Tartar joined me from the courtyard (poor fellow, his name sadly belied his kindly nature!), and proceeded before me to the garden, bounding backwards and forwards, and cutting all sorts of clumsy capers, to show his enjoyment.

‘Somehow one feels a better being out here than among noisy, dusty streets,’ I could not help thinking, as I strolled down the little avenue, close by the high old ivy-covered wall which separated us from the churchyard, and looked through the gates upon the quiet ‘brae’ and bridge reposing tranquilly in the morning sunshine,—with the thick foliage of the trees

of the churchyard and water-side overshadowing them on either side,—before turning into the garden. ‘How glad I am that *I* have not to live in a town! And yet I suppose my cousins wouldn’t change with me. Tastes differ indeed. I am very glad “the lines have fallen to me” in the pleasant places here.’

My heart bounded to the sunshine, almost as tangibly as Tartar, who came plunging down to the gate, to see why I was not following him to the garden, and stood waving his great feathery tail, and looking up at me with his wistful, earnest eyes, as if asking what I was thinking about; but he hushed his vociferous barking, in sympathy with my mood. The old elm-trees on each side of the walk, almost meeting each other overhead, seemed to be filled with a numerous colony of birds, that warbled a low sweet ode to the Sabbath morning; and the rich perfume of the flowers, which loaded the summer air, seemed to rise upward on the morning breeze, like ‘another kind of praise.’

Nothing human seemed abroad but myself, though it was nearly eight o’clock now. The little gardens in the village, which I could easily see from the bench under the walnut-tree, were still wrapped in profound repose; not a sound fell on the stillness but the song of the birds, the rustle of the corn-fields behind where I was sitting, and the ripple of the water just beyond the wall at the bottom of the garden. All around spoke of hallowed rest; and the busy hum of the bees, that were at work as usual, only made the contrast the more striking.

I had brought my Bible out with me, and opening it now—with the walnut-tree waving its large fragrant leaves in the soft morning air above my head, and all those sweet harmonious sights and sounds around me—I read several of the grand old Sabbath psalms with an appreciation and love I had scarcely ever felt before; and had lost myself in a train of very pleasant thought afterwards, when the gong sounded for prayers.

Every one was assembled and seated in the parlour, even Nurse and Betsy, before I got into the house and had laid aside my hat. Papa was sitting at the table, with the great Bible

open before him, ready to begin; and the morning sun was shining upon his silvery hair, and lighting up the china and silver of the breakfast equipage into a positive illumination. My chair was set for me in the window, where I had always used to sit; and, as I came in and took my old place, I felt how sweet it was to be again a member of a family, and not merely one of a large community.

After breakfast papa went back to the study to prepare for the services of the day, and the rest of us separated soon after, —mama to go up-stairs to her own room, Marianne to see after Harriet (who, though greatly better, was of course still in bed), Tom to prepare for his large class of boys in the evening, and Harry to the nursery to learn his Sabbath hymn. I remained alone in the parlour for some time after the others had gone, looking out on the trees and flowers opposite, and thinking of the long time that had passed since the last Sabbath I had been at home—trying also at intervals to get something out of *Eastern Manners*, which I had on the table before me, to give to the class I had undertaken to teach. And so the time passed quickly away until it was nearly the hour for church, which in the country is not till twelve o'clock.

It was pleasant to be back again in the old pew among the familiar faces, and to see the green boughs of the trees waving in at the open doors and through the large latticed windows, as they had done ever since I could remember, like the faces of so many friends. Just before the service began, I happened to glance up to the Dalmany pew in the front gallery, which had never been occupied since we came to the parish, and who should be sitting there, all alone in his glory, but the young proprietor himself! an object of wondering attention, as it seemed, to the whole congregation, who certainly had not expected to see him there.

Apparently he had just entered; and, as he sat leaning forward on the table, watching the people assembling, I had an opportunity of looking at him unobserved: I had scarcely seen him the day before.

He was a pleasant-looking young man, apparently about two

or three and twenty, not more. Aristocrat was written on every line of his face (that unmistakable look of 'blood' which all the cosmetics in the world fail to impart). It was a clear-cut, Saxon face, pale, with fair hair, clear blue eyes, and proud lips, with a winning, even sweet expression, which is not generally associated with that style of features, and which yet could be exchanged in a moment (as I had seen) for a scornful *hauteur* it were no hard work to raise. Report described Mr. Scott as having led a somewhat wild and irregular life since quitting Oxford; but if so, there was no trace of it apparent in the high-bred and delicately lined face before me.

I glanced next at Dr. Blackburn, who sat immediately below, and was amused to discover what a very different impression a slight degree of acquaintance had given me of him. He did not suffer from being looked at after Mr. Scott, quite the reverse, in my opinion; for, though I could not precisely define the difference (unless in the words of the Frenchman, when boasting of the *grande charme* of his *fiancée*, 'It was not de face, it was not de figure, it was not de manner, but it was de something'), yet I decidedly agreed with Nurse in 'liking the Doctor's looks the best.' But to compare them at all was absurd, dissimilar as they were in almost every respect. Dr. Blackburn was taller than Mr. Scott by nearly a head,—a dark, handsome, chieftain-looking man,—and in that alone lay a great difference. His face, too, was altogether of a different stamp. The expression, which in the one was simply aristocratic—the impress of high descent—was native nobility in the other, to which the darker attributes of eyes, hair, and complexion lent a singular grace. But I cannot describe Dr. Blackburn,—I could not then, and I certainly cannot now; I only know that from the hour I saw him first, before we had even interchanged a word, every tone of his deep melodious voice, every glance of those earnest truthful eyes, convinced me that his was a nature whom to know once was to trust for ever. As he sat with folded arms, and eyes bent on the large Bible that lay open before him (without so much as a transient glance around), till the service began, it was easy to peruse his



countenance ; and I could see from his weary, dejected air (so different from the first time I had seen him), as well as from the shade that now and again crossed his brow, that the cloud of yesterday, whatever its cause, had not permanently passed away.

Papa's voice, beginning the worship by giving out the psalm, broke the solemn silence that prevailed, and for the next hour and a half every wandering eye was fixed upon the Bibles or upon the minister ; while, for my own part, I forgot there was another individual in the church but myself, in the pleasure with which I listened to the warm, hearty singing of the dear old tunes, and heard the service I knew and loved best from my own father's lips.

'Is that Mr. Scott, Ellie ?' whispered Marianne, at the close of the service, when the congregation were dispersing. 'What a fine-looking young man he is !'

As we passed out among the last of the congregation, I saw Dr. Blackburn standing at the church door, on his way to the vestry (he was an elder), talking to the Maitlands and some friends who were with them, among whom was Mr. Scott. As we were not acquainted with the rest of the party, we passed, of course, with a bow ; but Mr. Scott, recognising me, came forward and shook hands, at the same time raising his hat to mama and the others. 'I trust Miss Fitz-James continues to improve?' he asked, his look and tone most cordial and sympathetic. And being answered in the affirmative, backed by the Doctor's authority, he expressed his pleasure and took a polite leave, and I joined the others.

After the second service, which in the country is always over early (in winter the services are not divided at all), we had dinner, and then we separated to our different spheres of duty,—papa to prepare for his third service (which was later in the evening, and was chiefly intended for the mill-workers, who, as a rule, would not come to church during the day); Tom to his senior boys' class at Colmuir End ; and I across to the village, where, in a large upper room, the Sabbath school, under the kind superintendence of Dr. Blackburn, was held.

Mama always took charge of Harry's lessons herself on Sabbath evenings; and Marianne (who did her share of parish work through the week) went up-stairs to read beside Harriet.

I confess to a good many tremors while putting on my bonnet to proceed to my new and rather formidable undertaking; but I had not the least intention of drawing back, and a talk I had had with Nurse in the middle of the day had given my courage the brace it needed.

Nurse had been expressing her triumphant satisfaction at Mr. Scott's good behaviour in coming to church and not to the chapel, as had been universally expected, and her delight that Mr. Morton would consequently be disappointed.

'Ay,' she wound up, 'I'm thinkin' he wad be lookin' gey glum the day, when he cam' intil the chapel and saw the Laird's seat empty. Ye ken, it's weel kent what brocht him to the kirk; but ony way, it's a blessin' the lad can keep his ain among them—it hasna lookit like it this while back. An' speakin' o' that, Miss Heelen, I maun tell ye about Miss Marshall' (the lady whose class I was to take, and who had just 'defected' to the chapel). 'Did ye ken she had ta'en six o' her scholars wi' her to the new schule? An' she's braggin' she'll hae the Gourlays an' a' the rest o' them after her in nae time. Ye see, the chapel folk are jist ravin' mad to get folk frae the kirk; so I thocht I wad tell ye, for ye to pit oot a' yer strength, an' no' let her get the bairns.'

Get my dear old friends the Gourlays? No indeed! I would put forth all my poor strength, if need be—and I would seek a Strength higher than my own—to prevent that!

My courage was still with me when I reached the school-room, where nearly two hundred children of all ages, and about eighteen teachers (male and female), were assembled. The harvest was plenteous enough, though the labourers were few; but volunteers for this service are always hard to secure, and I felt a pang of self-reproach as I reflected that in all probability I should never have enlisted either, had I not in a manner been 'pressed' into it.

Dr. Blackburn came forward to receive me, before I had

time to feel embarrassed, and lead me to a seat near himself, while he proceeded to open the school with prayer and praise, giving out for this purpose the 23rd Psalm.

The prayer ended, Dr. Blackburn proceeded to introduce me to my class, and led the way to the opposite side of the room, where a circle of grown-up girls awaited our approach. I must confess my courage fell considerably at the first sight of the decided 'front' my class thus presented, and, let those laugh who will, I maintain it was no inconsiderable ordeal for me to pass through, who was scarcely more than a school-girl myself, and with no experience of any sort to guide me. It was one, however (let me say it here, for the benefit of all who may read this), that I never had cause to regret; rather do I feel thankful every day, that I was called upon to make the effort. To that I ascribe my first insight into the real object and uses of life, as well as the rise of every practical or womanly quality I may now possess. The new world of life and character thus opened up to me, expanded my views in various ways; and the knowledge that so many young people, of nearly my own age (by circumstances less advantageously placed than myself), looked up to me as their guide, taught me the great lesson of living for others—thinking and acting for them, as I never could have learned in my sheltered and indulgent home.

I enjoyed the walk home considerably more than the walk to the school. It was now seven o'clock, and the bright afternoon had melted into sweet evening, the deep blue of the sky having given place to a crystalline clearness of colouring, or want of it rather, indescribably lovely and rest-inspiring. The birds had nearly all gone to rest—the very hum of the bees was hushed—the Sabbath peace and *rest* were over all; and the people quietly reading or smoking (while others read aloud), on benches outside their cottage-doors, or in their little gardens behind, formed a pleasing feature in the scene.

The Doctor walked across with me to the Manse, as he had to make his professional visit to Harriet, which he had not been able to do earlier, besides which, his young men's class

was held in the school-house, which was close to the church, and entered from the foot of the 'Manse brae.' The class did not begin till a quarter past seven, but the members of it (about forty in number) met at half-past six for a prayer-meeting, and for mutual improvement among themselves. 'They were very indulgent to him,' the Doctor said, 'and considerate to his engagements, and would wait patiently for any length of time, but he was generally able to be punctual at the quarter past.'

On the way he asked me how I liked my class?

I told him I thought we should get on well now, but that it was rather too bad to give me the most advanced class in the school, and at the very first too!

'Yes, it was too bad,' he replied, in that kind tone which, as Marianne had said, was so 'fatherly.' 'But really I did not know what to do with them. Not one of the other ladies would take that class, and they won't join Miss Smythe's class for mill-girls at Colmuir End; so I must either have taken them myself along with the grown-up boys, or dispersed them, which I would have been sorry to do. To say the truth, I was a little afraid to-night to leave you with such a charge on your hands; I had no idea they looked so old, till you were standing together. However, I soon saw that you were equal to it. You see I was supervising you, Miss Helen. Are you very indignant?'

He had a frank genial manner that was very catching.

'You are our head,' I said, smiling, 'and bound to keep us all in order, I suppose.'

'No sinecure sometimes, I assure you,—in regard to the juveniles, of course, I mean, not the teachers,' he added, smiling also. 'On a fine summer night like this, the little rogues get so restive there is no keeping them in check.'

'I think Harriet might have taken this class, though,' I said, as the thought occurred to me; 'she has had more than a year's experience, and she would have made a better teacher for those girls than I'

'Excuse me differing from you. There are some bold spirits

in that class that require a firm hand to deal with them. I doubt if Miss Fitz-James would have been fitted for such a task.'

'And I am? Thank you for the compliment.'

'I meant it as such.'

And I saw that he did. I could see, too, by his smile, that he was quite himself again, which was a great pleasure to me. Somehow, I felt already as if I were quite well acquainted with Dr. Blackburn.

We talked on several subjects walking along,—the neighbourhood amongst others, which I was glad he had the good taste to admire.

'Ah! but you must have lived in it for years, in order to love it,' I said warmly, as I felt. '*I* do not think there is such another sweet place on earth—it is almost my native place; but of course you cannot feel so yet.'

'Oh, but I have lived in it "for years" at one time, with my uncle, when I was a very small boy, in somewhat delicate health. It is almost my "Fatherland" as well. I used to know your cousins the Maitlands very well. And in later years I used to be out pretty often,—from Saturday till Monday, when I was a student at Edinburgh College, though I was too shy for visiting in those days. I remember being in church just after Dr. Fitz-James came to the parish, and seeing you all in the Manse pew, when you were a little thing, Miss Helen, scarcely higher than the table.'

'Oh, then, Mr. Scott must have been here too at that time, —long ago, I mean. Did you know him then?' The moment I had put the question, I remembered that I ought not to have done it, or have made the slightest allusion to their recognition of the previous day; and I did not mend the matter by reddening all over, and looking like a fool. Dr. Blackburn answered calmly enough,—

'I do not know him now. We have met once or twice before—in London; but that is the extent of our acquaintance.'

I scarcely heard the reply, I felt so annoyed at my inadvertence. I had not spoken of the circumstance at home, so

much did I dislike exposing any one's private feelings (neither, apparently, had Nurse as yet), and to think I should have blundered so now ! Would I ever learn to hold my tongue at the right time ? To change the conversation, I resumed the former topic, asking if there was much sickness in the parish just now ? There very often was at Colmuir End, even in the summer season, and sad accidents among the mill-workers,—the little hospital there, with its nine beds, being almost always full.

‘No, not a great deal, it is very gratifying to say. Their worst complaint, I believe, is not peculiar to Colmuir End ; and it is one for which a poor country doctor has small remedy in his power,—poverty.’

‘Ah, papa often feels that when he is visiting among his people. But then you can give relief in so many other ways, Dr. Blackburn. I have always thought a doctor's the noblest of all lives,—most like the Greatest of all. He brings happiness—comfort at least—to so many, like an angel of life and light often, I am sure. It is a blessed power to be able to give comfort in sickness.’

‘It is a blessed power to be able to give comfort in any circumstances,’ said the Doctor, turning to me with a smile, which it cheered me to see, and which lighted up his whole countenance, and made him look more attractive than I had ever seen him before. ‘If people only knew the inestimable worth of a kind and sympathetic word sometimes, they would not, I am sure, be so sparing in bestowing it.’

At this moment some one passed us, whom I did not at first recognise,—a gentlemanly though rather peculiar-looking man, in clerical costume. He recognised Dr. Blackburn with a low bow, but without lifting his eyes, as he hurried past in the direction of Dalmany.

‘Mr. Charteris,’ said the Doctor, answering my look ; ‘he is late for his duties to-night.’

‘Colston does not look like itself with all those changes,’ I could not help saying, sorrowfully enough, as the chapel bell just then sounded for vespers. ‘I wonder the people take

them so quietly ; but Scotland seems to be fast losing her old testifying spirit.'

'What can they do? Some of them, at least, have very little choice in the matter. It is Mr. Morton who makes their decisions for them ; his orders are that all who work on the estate must attend the chapel ; and they must submit, or be turned off—that's the alternative.'

I was silent from utter astonishment. That such coercion should be allowed to go on in Colston! It was interfering with the liberty of the subject with a vengeance!

'You know old Harper, who used to be one of the ploughmen at Dalmany? He declined to attend the chapel,—as one would suppose he had a right to do, if he chose,—and Morton not only discharged him from his employment, but, taking advantage of some trifling arrear of rent, actually turned the poor man and his family out into the street ; and had he not almost immediately obtained employment at Woodlands, they would have had no resource but the parish.'

'It is perfectly disgraceful that Mr. Scott should allow such a state of things!' I exclaimed indignantly ; 'he can't but know of them—in fact, they could not be done without his sanction. I wonder he is not ashamed to come down here to shoot, and to amuse himself, and do nothing whatever to benefit the place—his own place too—but the very reverse!'

'Patience,' said Dr. Blackburn, smiling at my vehemence ; 'Mr. Scott has not had time yet to do anything. When he sees matters for himself, I have no doubt he will rectify them at once. It does not do always to judge from first impressions, Miss Helen.'

'No.' Our eyes met ; he smiled—we both smiled.

'Oh, I know that you did not approve of me the first time we met,' I said, laughing ; 'and I—I was not much more flattering to you.'

'I saw that. But "not approve,"—that is a strong expression. No, very far from that ; but I thought (I may tell you now, Miss Helen) that there was a degree of reserve about you which I did not quite understand—which was different,

too, from what I had been led to expect. I see now that I was wrong ; and I am glad of it,' he added in his frank way.

He was evidently much more sensitive than I had supposed. I could not bear to think I had hurt his feelings.

'Dr. Blackburn,' I cried impulsively, as we came to the Manse door, 'if ever you see that in me again, or think you see it, will you tell me of it? I know my manner is a little stiff sometimes,—mama used to tell me so,—and I don't mean it. Will you promise?'

The genial smile again lighted up his features as he turned to me cordially and held out his hand.

'I will, Miss Helen, provided you will do the same by me. Do you agree?'

We shook hands in token of assent as the door opened, and then separated, he going straight up-stairs to Harriet's room, and I to the parlour to lay aside my books and have tea ; nor (as he did not remain above a few minutes) did I see him again that night.

My tea that Sabbath night tasted sweeter than I ever remembered it to have done before. It was my first Sabbath at home after many months' absence, for one thing, and, besides that reason, I had the pleasant feeling that 'something attempted, something done,' however small, had fairly earned the enjoyment.

It was still not much after seven o'clock, and there was plenty of time in the 'lovely leafy month of June' for a stroll and meditation in the garden ; so, exchanging my bonnet for my garden-hat, and taking up a favourite book, to read in the garden, I ran up-stairs first to ask for Harriet.

I found Marianne sitting in the window of Harriet's room reading aloud to her. (Mama at that hour was always engaged in the nursery—Harry having had his lessons and gone to bed—reading aloud to Nurse and Betsy, both of whom decidedly preferred hearing 'the mistress' to reading for themselves.)

'And how are you, dear?' I asked, going up to the sofa on which she was sitting up, with shawls wrapped round her, and certainly looking much better.



'Oh, nearly well again. The Doctor says I shall be out of his hands immediately. Wasn't it a stupid fall?'

'And how did *you* get on, Miss Ellie?' asked Marianne, putting down her book and fixing her merry eyes on me. 'I hope you kept up your character in the school—cool and easy, as the Doctor thinks you?'

'How do you know he thinks that?' I asked, surprised.

'Didn't I hear him say so? He was praising you at no end of a rate last night, though he was so hurried he had scarcely time to speak; and to-night he told us that both the Admiral and Mr. Scott had been praising you in unmeasured terms too for your "conduct." He evidently thinks you could stand fire, or anything, Ellie,—in short, that you might have gone out with Miss Nightingale to nurse the wounded soldiers at the Crimea, if you had not been in the nursery yourself at the time.'

'Oh, May, such nonsense you do talk!' said Harriet, laughing; 'you know the Doctor said nothing the least like that.'

'I think it was excessively like it,' protested Marianne, laughingly tossing away my hand, which I had placed over her lips. 'He said "Miss Helen had been very brave, and had done the best that could have been done in the circumstances," and that "he wished he could find such a nurse for some of his bad cases." Isn't that praise, Ellie? And from him too! I assure you it is something.'

'It was just far too much. I did nothing to deserve it,' I said. 'He must have been laughing at me.'

'You don't know the Doctor if you think that, Ellie,' said both Harriet and Marianne at the same time. 'That is not one of his faults—to laugh at any one.'

Whether the praise was merited or not, it was pleasant to hear; and I had my own reasons for believing that he did not use words lightly. But 'brave,'—as Tom would say, 'Much he knew about it.' At all events, I was glad he thought so, and I would try—ah, how I would try!—to deserve his good opinion.



## CHAPTER V.

### AN UNEXPECTED VISIT.

‘I think if anything was to be foreseen, I have as sharp a look-out as another, and yet I foresee nothing.’

**T**HE next few days were like their predecessors, lovely and genial, in harmony with the sunshiny month, which Tuesday had introduced, and to household heads like mama, and all family people, invaluable for getting through a deal of summer work. Very busy we were those three days; if not, like Lady Capulet, ‘from break of day,’ at least from early in the forenoon, gathering fruit, and manufacturing it into preserves and other ‘confects’ not intrusted to the hands of nurse (who, her nursery-rule become a sinecure, was now, since our good old cook Peggy had retired into private life, the presiding genius of the kitchen); and any school-girl, newly home, as I was, after a pretty lengthened absence, will readily understand how keenly I enjoyed the change. When the spirit is young, and fresh, and untroubled, little suffices to make life an Eden—this world a garden of delights. Harriet, too, was getting well rapidly, so that there was nothing to damp our family enjoyment. There was also work of a different sort, and for me no less needful, awaiting our leisure in the parlour,—to wit, sundry voluminous pieces of cotton, linen, and flannel to be ‘made up,’ as well as various summer dresses from the dressmaker to be ‘tried on;’ few people being of opinion, with the Doctor’s Jenny, that ‘gude stuff goons’ were the best for all seasons,—in summer to keep out the heat, and in winter to keep out the cold.

'The Doctor's Jenny,' *par parenthèse* (or, as Tom had it, 'the Cerberus of Colston Lodge'), was an institution in the neighbourhood, recognised and duly respected as such. She had managed Dr. Hunter's house, and himself, for upwards of twenty years, and had now transferred her services, *in toto*, to Dr. Blackburn. Nurse and her sister (the Maitlands' good and faithful nurse) were Jenny's sole relations in the world, which relationship had, in earlier days, formed, perhaps, as strong a bond as any between the Lodge and the Manse.

Busy, pleasant days those were—between nursing, reading to the patients in the hospital (alternately with Marianne) an hour each morning, cooking, and sewing—a change of scene for me; and the Doctor arriving one day in the midst of all, and coming straight up-stairs as usual, taking three steps at a time, his coat had a narrow escape, as I was rushing down without perceiving him, my hands covered with flour.

'Oh, Doctor!' I exclaimed, laughing, as we both stopped short, just in time. I could say nothing more.

'Miss Helen! I did not expect to see *you* performing feats in that line.'

'Why not?'

'I don't know; somehow I did not expect it.'

'Did you expect me to be above that sort of thing?'

'No,' with very marked emphasis; 'you are above what I had thought. I had fancied, somehow, Miss Helen, that (shall I say it?)—that you were too "blue" to—to—'

'To do anything useful? I shall remember that, Doctor,' I added, laughing, and escaping down-stairs.

Wednesday evening was too showery to go out; and, as mama and Marianne had carried their work to Harriet's room, papa being busy in the study, I had the parlour all to myself, and an hour or two of delicious quiet over my own special avocations,—my journal, writing, etc.,—feeling that it was like old times, when papa, Tom, and I used to be accused of shutting ourselves up like bears, in our dens, all day long, and only appearing at 'feeding time' (not that we had any resemblance to them in other respects, it was to be hoped).

I could hardly realize that it was barely yet a week since I had left school ; it seemed such a long, long time to look back upon ! And after I had completed my writing, I sat thinking in the twilight over all that had occurred since then, indulging also in various visions of futurity, not much more rational, if less splendid, than those of nurse.

‘It is strange men never like to hear of women trying to gain a little knowledge — being “blue,” as they call it,’ I thought, as I recalled Dr. Blackburn’s words of the day before. ‘They make them welcome to “bake and brew, and shape and sew,” and even to paint and play, and speak all the languages under the sun, if they like (that is all quite *en règle*); but let them dare to venture the least little bit beyond that, and how they laugh ! They are jealous, I think,—afraid that we beat them in their own particular lines ; and Dr. Blackburn is not a bit better than his neighbours in that respect. Well, I thought he was.’

‘Sitting in the dark, Ellie ?’ said Marianne, coming into the room an hour later, and finding me half asleep, as she supposed. ‘What were you dreaming about ?’

She drew me to the window as she spoke, and we stood together looking out at the ‘shades of evening’ closing rapidly over the fine old trees by the water-side and in the churchyard.

‘I was thinking of you, dear, among other things, wishing you had not to go so far away,’ I answered, laying my head down on her shoulder.

‘Two or three years hence, you foolish Ellie ! dozens of things may happen before then. Harriet and you may both be married, twice over, before that time comes.’

‘Once will do for me,’ I said, smiling at the idea. ‘I don’t believe in second love.’

Marianne did not answer ; she was watching the stars overhead, not with any shade of sentiment, however—that was not at all in her line.

‘I wish we could read the stars, to find out what will happen to us all,’ she said at last. ‘I know my own lot pretty

well—at least I think I do ; but I should like to know what is to happen to the rest, and who my other brothers and sisters will be. I suppose Harriet is sure to marry one of these days, though she has to find “the lord and the castle” yet,’ she added, alluding to an old gipsy prediction at Westermuir regarding Harriet.

‘There is one at the door all ready,’ said I, laughing. ‘The Scotts were lords once, and may be again, one of these days, for all we know.’

‘Oh, the Elphinstones will pick *him* up ; I never would dream of him, he is so gay, and all that, you know—and besides, I think I have heard that he is engaged to his cousin, either Miss Elphinstone or Lady Emmeline Harwood. But I do wonder who the knight-elect can be ? It can’t be Major Hayes,—his family would eat him if he thought of such a thing (and he is such a silly-looking youth besides) ; Colonel Elphinstone, ditto ; and then neither Mr. Farquharson nor Dr. Blackburn have any of the essentials—rank, wealth, and so forth. So you see, Ellie, it must be somebody who has to appear yet. I wonder where he is just now ?’

‘And I ? what will my fortune be ?’ I asked, responding to her mood.

‘Oh, you must be an “old maid,” Ellie,’ laughed she. ‘It would never do for us *all* to go away, and leave mama and papa alone. Somehow, I couldn’t fancy you in love, Ellie, unless it was with somebody that loved you very, very much, and got round you in that way.’

‘I’m not likely to be tried,’ I said, laughing. I was not greatly concerned about my future lot. I was quite contented and happy in the present ; and mama, coming into the room just then to ring for prayers, put an end to our conversation.

The next day was still showery and a little cold, though it cleared towards afternoon sufficiently to admit of Tom walking in to Edinburgh, as he often did, to spend the evening with a fellow-student. Mama and papa were engaged to dine in the evening at Colonel Craufurd’s, and left home about four o’clock to walk there ; and we resolved to have a delightful early tea

all by ourselves, especially as Harriet was to be down-stairs for the first time to the parlour sofa.

Mama had ordered a small fire to be put on, to make the room look cheerful for Harriet; and a picture of comfort it did look, when the tea-things had been brought in, and the sofa wheeled forward to the fire. Marianne, still sitting at the window, was making the most of the not very bright light, to plait and arrange the child's dress she was making for Lady Maitland's bazaar, with the trimmings scattered about her, and a large basket of other articles for the same purpose standing by her chair. Nurse had been baking, and a large salver of beautiful 'scones' stood on the table, along with some of the preserves we had been making the day before. Altogether, I thought it looked bright enough for any invalid.

'We are three regular old maids, all by ourselves to-night,' said Harriet, smiling, as she was comfortably installed on her sofa, in her warm scarlet flannel dressing-gown, though rather pale and shaky still. 'Is Harry out too?'

'Yes, he was quite wild with having been kept in the house all day, and mama thought it as well to let him have tea, and go with Betsy to Colmuir End. It would keep the house quieter for you.'

'It is not very *quiet*, with Anne's tongue in it,' said Marianne, as, the door being open for a moment, a torrent of talk, carried on in no dulcet tones, reached us from the kitchen regions (Anne being the 'help' who assisted with the washing, and also with the housework on extra occasions). 'I'm sure, if the Doctor heard that, he would be prohibiting "excitement" for Harriet,' she added, laughing.

'Is he coming to-night?' I asked.

'I don't know. He said it would be the evening, at all events, before he could be over, as he had to attend a Faculty meeting in Edinburgh. I wish he would not take the trouble of coming at all; I am quite well now;' and she laid her head somewhat wearily back on the pillows.

'You have tired yourself dressing, dear,' I said, as I arranged the pillows and drew the plaid over her. 'I will

get you a cup of tea, and that will revive you ;' and I lifted the teapot to the tray, and began to fill it up.

Just as I was doing so, two shadows passed the window, and a loud peal at the bell startled us all.

'There are two gentlemen,' exclaimed Marianne, in dismay ; 'and I *think* one of them is Admiral Scott. Whoever they are, Ellie, you must go up-stairs and entertain them. I must get this done with daylight.'

'They won't come in when mama and papa are both out,' I said, coolly filling up the teapot.

Scarcely were the words uttered, when the parlour door was thrown wide open, and, without announcement of any sort, Anne Millar ushered in the Admiral and Mr. Scott.

Harriet started from her recumbent posture, overturning the pillows as she did so ; her naturally colourless face becoming paler from the exertion ; while Marianne's work dropped from her hand in the surprise of the moment, and fell in a heap on the floor ; and I stood with the teapot still in my hand, really not clear for the moment what I was about ; Anne putting the climax to the confusion by exclaiming, in apologetic accents, as she closed the door,—

'Shuld I no' hae puttin' them in here ? but ye ken I wasna tell't.'

The gentlemen must have seen at a glance that their introduction into this room was somewhat *mal-à-propos* ; but they were too thoroughly gentlemen to seem to observe this. Darting forward to Harriet, with an agility scarcely to be expected at fifty-eight, the Admiral picked up the pillows and gently replaced her against them.

'Nay, Miss Fitz-James,' said he, 'you shall not do us so much grace. I know by experience what a fall is.'

And, shaking hands successively with Marianne and me, he established himself comfortably in the easy-chair. Mr. Scott shook hands also, and remained standing by Harriet.

'You do not look well,' I overheard him say to her in tones of the most respectful interest and sympathy ; 'are you at all better ?'

‘Oh, so much better!’ she answered, with a smile. ‘The Doctor would have kept me prisoner in my room another day, but I felt too well.’

‘I am very glad.’

I had gathered my senses about me by this time, and, after a few minutes, as tea was already more than infused, acting on my own impulse (for it was of course impossible to consult any one else, even by looks), I asked the gentlemen if they would not have some along with us, as it was probably not yet near their dinner-hour.

They assented most readily.

‘A cup of tea will be most acceptable after our long walk,’ said the Admiral; ‘we have been over the moors as far as Strathie to-day, examining them with a view to the Twelfth. Would you have believed it of me, Miss Fitz-James?’

He placed a chair at the table for Marianne, as he spoke, and sat forward himself. Mr. Scott took a chair near the sofa, where he had been standing; and Nurse presently entered with additional tea-things.

‘Would you ask a blessing for us, Admiral Scott?’ I ventured next, as we were all seated round the table, in right of my position at the tray.

Which the old gentleman did most reverently and beautifully; and from that moment I felt—we all felt—that whatever might be our denominational differences here, the Admiral was a true member of the Church above.

It was wonderful how quickly we lost the stiffness of first acquaintance. The Admiral was a most pleasant old man, totally unlike the rest of the Scotts; and his frank, sailor-like manner set us all at our ease. He seemed greatly to relish this innovation in his ordinary habits, and enjoyed the tea and toast and small-talk as much as any young lady in the land. Mr. Scott, too, to judge from his expression, seemed to feel equally comfortable. He did not, indeed, speak a great deal, and what he did say was in the quietest ‘gentlemanliest’ tone; but he appeared perfectly contented with his present position, and attended assiduously to Harriet, as if he desired



no better entertainment. I wondered that so much should be said of his pride and reserve : he seemed so different here !

Still, I must confess it was somewhat heavy work to get along—at least *I* felt it so. The power of sustaining a general conversation in a mixed company is a very rare gift ; and, in spite of the Admiral's efforts, with every wish on all sides to please, the flagging pauses were numerous.

We had nearly finished tea, when a second peal at the bell announced a fresh arrival, and Dr. Blackburn entered. A welcome sight to some of us !

'How are you, Doctor?' said the Admiral, cordially shaking hands, after salutations had been exchanged with us. 'Reginald, Dr. Blackburn and you are acquainted, I believe?'

I have that pleasure slightly,' said Mr. Scott, with some dubiousness of expression, rising, but retaining his place by the sofa, as if he thought Dr. Blackburn might usurp it.

Dr. Blackburn, however, seemed to have no intention of the kind. He shook hands courteously, not cordially, with Mr. Scott, then crossed over and took a seat by the Admiral, at the opposite side of the table.

'Will you allow me to give you some tea, Dr. Blackburn?' I asked.

Thank you, Miss Helen, I have just had tea ; I never wait long for that. It is my unfailing restorative after a day's work, he added, with a smile.

'Have you just returned from Edinburgh, Doctor?' asked Marianne.

'Just half an hour ago.'

Though Dr. Blackburn declined to join in our social repast, somehow his mere presence at the table was enlivening, like the effect of a sunbeam on a shady day, and, like that too, it was something to be felt, rather than described. If it is 'the honourablest part of talk to give the occasion,' Dr. Blackburn conferred that boon liberally on the present company. The gift of conversation, which we wanted, was natural to him—he had much of papa's genius in that respect ; and, whether it was the strange power that he had of drawing out the conversa-

tional talents of others, making them shine in his own reflected radiance, or whether it was the fascination of his own powers solely, there were certainly no more 'awful pauses,' nor any want of animation, during the remainder of the evening.

Under this influence the Admiral came out amazingly. He told many amusing anecdotes of his seafaring experience, and adventures he had met with in foreign lands—telling them well, too; and then the Doctor and he exchanged sporting reminiscences scarcely less amusing (for it appeared that Dr. Blackburn, not so many years ago, had been quite as much addicted to the 'manly sports' as any one). They had also a fertile topic of interest between them in discussing the parliamentary elections then on the *tapis* in different parts of the country. Marianne and I, listening with pleased attention, had to assist merely with a word or a question now and again.

I could see that Mr. Scott also was improving the occasion to his own satisfaction, though he took no part in the general conversation. He had drawn his chair quite away from the table, turning it towards the sofa; and Harriet and he appeared to be getting on uncommonly well, judging from the scraps of conversation I overheard.

'You are fond of plants, I see,' said Mr. Scott, pointing to a small fernery under its case on the side-table.

'Oh, those are Ellie's ferns! I am not skilled in nursing them as she is.'

'If you would take the trouble of going up into the woods behind the castle, you would find some fine specimens of ferns,' proceeded Mr. Scott, not deigning to notice this reference. 'Some of them, I understand, are destined for the next horticultural exhibition.'

'But we cannot go into the woods now,' said Harriet impulsively, forgetting for the moment, I suppose, to whom she was stating this fact.

'Why not?'

'We do not go there, of course, when the family—I mean, we never should think of intruding when'— She broke off in

some confusion, as the various recollections suggested by the word no doubt reurred to her.

‘I did not know I was such an ogre.’

‘Reginald,’ called out the Admiral at that moment.

He turned at the call, but not before he had said a word to Harriet, which I did not hear, but which had the effect of bringing a slight suffusion of colour to her cheek, and a not at all displeased little smile, as she suddenly looked away.

‘Reginald,’ proceeded the Admiral, ‘who do you suppose gained two of the prizes at the horticultural show last week? I don’t think I mentioned it to you?’

‘I don’t think you did.’

‘It was that old man Gourlay, whom Sir John was talking to you about this morning. He is a sort of general gardener, it appears. So much for our village *servants* over your scientific gardeners.’

Mr. Scott’s face flushed blood-red,—it might be at the ignominious defeat of his own gardeners, it might be at some reminiscence of the conversation in question. But what was stranger still, I could not get rid of the impression that Dr. Blackburn coloured too; he certainly started, and his eyes met Mr. Scott’s with a glance that seemed as if they would read his very soul. Strange—passing strange it was—that any emotion at all should have been called forth by the mention of a circumstance so insignificant!

Mr. Scott, however, seemed to regain his equanimity almost as suddenly as he had lost it. Haughtily—defiantly, as it seemed to me—returning the glance, he made some indifferent observation to his uncle, and turned again to Harriet, as if no interruption had occurred.

Dr. Blackburn did not recover himself so soon. On his impressionable countenance the traces of emotion, of whatever nature, were not so easily effaced—a burning flush mounted to his forehead, and his eyes, for the moment, flashed positive fire, while a glance of most biting scorn shot from them, on the haughty, impassive face opposite. Gradually he became excessively pale, as I had once seen him before; but the expression

of indignation, contempt, or whatever the feeling was that had been called forth, did not pass from his features, even though he resumed the conversation ; and I observed that more than once, in the course of it, his hands were clasped nervously together, as if he were revolving some painful point in his mind.

The whole had been so sudden—the glance and its effects—that the Admiral had not even seen it, as he and Marianne were engaged at the moment examining a plant she had brought from the stand, and which had induced his remark: Neither did he seem at all to observe that anything was amiss. Marianne did, though she mistook the cause.

‘Dr. Blackburn!’ she exclaimed, ‘are you ill?—you look dreadfully pale! Is anything the matter?’

‘No, no, it is nothing,—thank you, Miss Marianne,’ he answered hurriedly, annoyed seemingly that his looks had called forth observation, and he turned the subject.

But the conversation did not get on,—the harmony of the evening had been rudely broken, and no efforts of ours could cement it.

Presently Dr. Blackburn rose, saying that he had an appointment, and must be off. He shook hands with us, and with the Admiral, with the air of one whose thoughts are far away ; and, with a slight, haughty bow to Mr. Scott, who returned it as haughtily, he quitted the room.

I went out with him. I had already bid him good-bye ; but he looked ill. I saw that something had vexed and annoyed him ; and I could not bear that we should seem unkind. Mechanically he took his hat and walked out, without seeming to observe me. At the door he stopped short, and raised his hand with a sudden deprecatory gesture.

‘Well,’ he exclaimed, ‘here have I left without even asking your sister how she is ! I must go back ;’ and he half turned. ‘But no,’ he added again ; ‘I am not master of myself to-night ; I shall come the first thing in the morning, which will do as well, I hope.’

I said that he need not disturb himself on Harriet’s account, as she was almost quite well again.

'No, she is not quite well,' he answered, in the same tone of excitement; 'and she is taking far too much fatigue for the first time of sitting up; but, of course, I could have said nothing as to that in the circumstances. The coward!' he added, in a low, suffocated tone; and he covered his face with his hand, as the expression I had before observed, mingled with some yet more painful feeling, passed over it again.

'Dr. Blackburn, you *are* ill,' I ventured to say; for his paleness was alarming. 'I wish you would take something,—some wine,—or, at least, sit down for a few minutes.' He scarcely seemed to hear.

'The coward!' he repeated, as if unconscious that he spoke aloud. 'The coward! I could have pardoned open wrong, had he acknowledged it; but dissimulation!—to assure me solemnly that he knew nothing!'

His very lips had grown livid, and he leaned against the pillar as if for support. I could not resist the impulse to speak out.

'Dr. Blackburn,' I said earnestly, forgetting all else in my wish to soothe him, 'if Mr. Scott has injured you in any way, —if it is past,—do not think of it more; you will only hurt yourself; do not speak of it to him.'

'Not speak of it!' he exclaimed vehemently. (I do not think he remembered at the time that he was speaking to any one; he was but uttering aloud his own bitter thoughts.) 'Do you suppose I will not let him know what I think of him? Do you suppose I will not demand an explanation?'

'Do not, Dr. Blackburn,' I urged more earnestly, a nameless fear coming over me. 'It can do no good to recall the past,—suffer it to rest.'

'What!' he cried, in a still more excited tone, the words breaking from him as it were in spite of himself. 'Is he to do me the deepest wrong that one man can do to another, and am I tamely to submit to it? Is he— You expect too much from a man's philosophy, Miss Fitz-James,' he added, assuming a calmer tone.

Perhaps I ought not to have said more, especially consider-

ing that I was totally ignorant of any of the circumstances of the case ; but I was never given to stand on ceremony, when the occasion seemed to me to warrant plain speaking, and his face terrified me.

‘Dr. Blackburn,’ I said, as quietly and steadily as I could, ‘excuse my venturing to say so much ; but you may be mistaken in your surmises,—I hope, for your own sake, you may,—and were you to do or say anything rash, you would be sorry for it afterwards. I know you would.’

‘I am not mistaken ; it was all too palpable in his face to-night ; and I was fool enough to believe him!’ he went on, his tone growing excited again, — ‘to accept his word of honour,—*his* word of honour!’ he repeated with scornful bitterness ; ‘but I will not suffer myself to be cajoled a second time. Excuse me, Miss Helen, you are very kind, very kind ; but you don’t know the circumstances.’

‘I do not, indeed,’ I said, and I felt my own face grow pale as I spoke ; ‘but whatever they may be, Dr. Blackburn, at least think on your own words on Sabbath night,—“As we show mercy and forgiveness unto others, *even so* we ask them for ourselves ;” and act,—I know you will,—act accordingly.’

I did not look at Dr. Blackburn as I said this. I almost feared he might be offended at my presuming to offer my girlish advice to him ; but he was not ; when he spoke again his tone was very much more gentle than it had been.

‘Do you really mean to infer that we ought not to resent injuries, however aggravated they may be?’ he asked, without looking up. ‘Surely you do not hold to the literal turning of the left cheek?’

‘No ; but we must hold to the *spirit* of the injunction,—to bear patiently even with wrong, and not be ready to avenge it.’ I added hesitatingly, ‘It is not easily practised, Dr. Blackburn ; still, we must try ;’ and my voice involuntarily took a pleading tone.

Dr. Blackburn stood as if in dire perplexity and irresolution, his face not changing from its ashen hue. At last, as if he had formed his resolve, he turned to me and took both my

hands in his, pressing them almost to pain. 'Yes, you are right,' he said, his voice hoarse with emotion; 'I have passed my word, and cannot go from it. Let the secret remain between ourselves, Miss Helen,—let no one else have any hint of it.'

Not very likely! I did not answer, only met his eyes; but I think he saw that he might implicitly trust me. 'God bless you!' he said fervently;—'God bless you for this, and all your kindness to me!'

Twice over he said that, and left me.

'I can't think how people can be unkind,' I thought, as I slowly returned to the parlour. 'One thing I am sure of, though, that whoever is in the wrong, it is not Dr. Blackburn: any one may read truth and honour in his face. Whatever is between them (and I *do* wonder what it is), I could stake my life that *he* is not to blame.'

And yet it was as hard to believe evil of that other face (so refined, so winning, as I could not but confess), even looking at it with that intent, as I did. The young Laird of Dalmany was as serenely calm and at his ease as if no such thing as wrong existed in the world. It was a great mystery altogether.

The gentlemen had risen to go when I re-entered the parlour. The Admiral was standing by Harriet, expressing his hope that she would not be the worse for their long sederunt.

'Time flies fast in pleasant company, Miss Fitz-James,' he said, with his old-fashioned, courtly politeness. 'I had not the most distant idea that it was so late.'

I stole a sidelong glance at Mr. Scott, as he bent over Harriet's hand longer than he had any need to do, I thought.

'No, he certainly does not look as if he could injure any one,' I said to myself again; 'there must surely be some mistake; and yet—what could those strange looks mean?'

The Admiral shook hands with us in succession; he had a courtly phrase for each. Mr. Scott also shook hands, and they took leave, Betsy (returned from Colmuir End) ushering them,

in orthodox fashion, to the door. Then came the grand simultaneous burst.

‘Well—of all nights, to think they should have chosen this! And to be brought into this room!’

‘And Anne opening the door!’ subjoined Marianne, who seemed to take that to heart more than anything else. ‘What would they think? Such a barbarian as she is!’

I could not help laughing. ‘Poor Anne!’ I said; ‘they would easily see she was not the authorized door-keeper, if they thought of it at all; which I don’t suppose they did. I thought I should have laughed outright when she laid their cards on a plate before me,—“There’s twa tickets they gied me,” she said. I wonder if they heard!’

‘I think I should have been a great deal more inclined to cry,’ said Harriet, to whom it certainly seemed to be no laughing matter. ‘It was most provoking that *she* should appear to-night,—a thing she never did before! Really, Nurse must be spoken to about it,—I never was so annoyed in my life.’

‘If their dinner is waiting all this time, it will be nicely cooked,’ laughed Marianne, getting over her little vexation very easily, as she generally did, and sitting down comfortably in her favourite position on the hearth-rug before the fire. ‘It must be past nine o’clock; who could have thought of their staying so late?’

‘The Admiral is a dear old man,’ said I. ‘He has such a benignant expression, and he is so good! What does everybody think of Mr. Scott?’

‘Oh, he is pleasant enough,’ said Harriet laconically, becoming all at once ‘indisposed’ for conversation, and leaning her head back on the sofa.

‘He really is exceedingly handsome!’ cried Marianne, with her usual enthusiasm. ‘What a beautiful face he has!—so high-bred! I’m not sure but he throws even the Doctor himself into the shade.’

(‘Does he, indeed?’ thought I; ‘so much for the admiration of young ladies.’)

‘He speaks so beautifully, too!’ she went on,—neither



Harriet nor I, for different reasons, caring to reply. 'I admire the English accent. Dr. Blackburn's Highland tones are very pleasant; but I think I like the other tones best. And oh! isn't the Admiral proud of him?—it's "Reginald this" and "Reginald that" perpetually! If I were his other nephews, I would be jealous, I think.'

Harry now came bounding into the room, and laid himself down on the rug beside Marianne, at the same time demanding 'tea' most clamorously.

'So you have got home, Harry,' said Marianne, patting the little head that lay against her. 'How had you the unusual discretion to stay away till the visitors were gone?'

'Nurse laid hold of me, and held me till they were away, because I wouldn't have my hair brushed,' whined Harry. 'I'm going to tell mama whenever she comes home; but I want tea, Ellie.'

I went to the kitchen to ask Nurse to get him some; and very full Nurse was of the visitors we had just had; but I was amused to find that her verdict as to their relative attractions was diametrically the opposite of Marianne's.

'Ye wad gang far or ye got twa like them,' was her wind-up, after a long string of 'personalities'; 'but the Doctor was "King o' the Hielandmen,"—he was that; an' I'm shure ye'll say't, Miss Heelen?'

It was my opinion, certainly; but I had no intention of 'saying' so.

'We know the Doctor best, Nurse,' I answered evasively.

'Na; it's no' that,' said Nurse, with dignity; 'it doesna tak' a year to see what folk's like, surely? I ken faces tae, Miss Heelen, though ye maybe wadna think it; the Doctor's ane to be lippen'd to, through thick an' thin; but I'm far mista'en if the Laird's no' o' the kind that heed for naething but their ain pleeshurs; hoosomever, gin Miss Harrit's pleased, it's nae business o' ony ither body's.'

'And what has Harriet to do with it?' I asked, with a smile, well used now to Nurse's speculations.

She seemed, however, to be more than usually serious in her

'impressions' on the present occasion, and took me up somewhat sharply.

'Miss Heelen,' said she, turning round suddenly, with the teacup in her hand, 'ye'll no' tell me that ye dinna see what's as plain as parritch to a'body else? What brocht the Laird to the kirk on Sabbath-day, think ye, but ae thing (he's no sae kirk greedy; his ain very flunkies 'll tell ye that)? an' what brocht him here the nicht—biding a' this time—but just that same?'

'And don't you suppose the Admiral might wish to see papa?' suggested I, not quite prepared to adopt this sweeping conclusion.

'The Admiral's just an auld wife,' was the somewhat irrelevant reply; 'the Laird can twist him roond wi' his little finger. Ye'll no' tell me,—it's just the Doctor's been here ower often this while back to please his honour. An' I'll tell ye, the Doctor wasna just that weel pleased aether, when he heard wha it was that was in.'

'Did you think so, Nurse?' cried I, with new and sudden interest (this last item sent quite a new light into my mind). 'Did he say anything?'

'He wasna like to say onything to me, atweel,' returned Nurse, not yet altogether mollified; 'but I hae an e'e in my head, if ither folk hae nane, an' I ken what I ken—though, to be sure, I hae nae call to be seein' things maybe no meant to be seen.'

'And "maybe" never existing,' I privately subjoined, as Nurse arranged Harry's tea-equipage on a tray, and bustled away with it to the parlour, while I stood by myself by the kitchen fire, musing over what I had heard, wondering if this supposed rivalry (granting it to be true) could indeed constitute the 'wrong' that had been done—the 'secret' I had been asked to keep. It was possible; indeed I began now to think it was very probably also; but as I could come to no certain conclusion on the subject, I once more tried to banish it from my mind.

When mama and papa came home, not long afterwards, the

details of the evening had of course to be gone over again, and all the changes rung thereupon for their edification.

'And what sort of company is Mr. Scott?' asked papa; 'not very affable, I suppose?'

'Oh, Harriet can tell that best; she had all the benefit,' cried Marianne, laughing. 'He never so much as looked at us.'

'Marianne! how can you be so absurd?' interrupted Harriet hastily, and evidently annoyed. 'You saw quite as much of Mr. Scott as I did.'

'Oh, oh!' exclaimed Marianne; 'what a—an imagination Harriet must have! I call upon Ellie to bear witness to the right.'

'He looks a pleasant young man. It was a pity they happened to call when we were out,' said mama, coming in to cover the *badinage*, which Harriet evidently was not in the mood to take; and Nurse appearing at the moment to carry off Harry, and Harriet choosing also to retire before prayers, the conversation itself was broken up. What a strange pleasant evening it had been!





## CHAPTER VI.

### VISITORS.

‘A lord and a lady went up at full sail,  
When a bee chanced to light on the opposite scale.’

*Philosopher’s Scales.*

**T**HE rest of that week passed in a quietly pleasant and uneventful manner. On Sabbath, Nurse was again gratified by the sight of Mr. Scott at the parish church, and we all had the pleasure of exchanging a few words with him, as also with the Maitlands, at the church-door. In the evening I again had my class with even greater comfort and pleasure than the former evening; and the Doctor, who walked with us to the end of the bridge, congratulated me on having gained a complete conquest over their hearts.

Tuesday (which was the 8th of July) was as bright and fair as any heart could wish, and among other pleasures it brought us the very great one of a visit from Aunt Fitz-James, and Cousins Mary and Lizzie (Charlie’s sisters), who usually came at this season for summer lodgings to a pretty farm-cottage about three miles from Colston.

They arrived early, just after I had come in from the hospital, and we had a merry morning hearing all the Edinburgh news, and telling everything that had occurred since we met. We spent a long time in the garden, among the flowers and strawberries (pleasant novelties to residents in a city), and then we went indoors to Harriet’s room, where mama and Aunt Fitz-James were sitting.

Harriet was quite well now, and sitting in the window, busy with the bazaar work, but she did not usually come downstairs till the evening, as Dr. Blackburn had insisted on a fortnight's entire rest for her foot, which, happily, was nearly all right again. She came down, however, with us now. We were regaling ourselves in the parlour with a more substantial lunch of bread and jelly, when nurse came suddenly into the room to announce that Miss Elphinstone and Leddy Charlotte (the Earl's daughter) were 'ridin' up the brae, and the young Laird wi' them;' adding, 'I cam' to tell ye, Miss Marianne, in case ye wad like to pit on another dress, for that ane's gey soiled wi' the garden, an' a' thegither,—there's plenty time.'

'Miss Elphinstone!' repeated Marianne, disregarding this hint, and looking to Harriet in surprise; 'what can have brought her here?—she never called before.'

'I don't think she has been much at home since she left school,' I observed; 'you know Lady Elphinstone said so the last time she was here.'

Harriet said nothing, but she looked—well, I cannot exactly say how.

'They are distinguished looking girls,' said Lizzie, who had gone to the window. 'What a flutter of veils, and feathers, and pretty little gold-mounted whips!'

'They will see you, Lizzie,' suggested Marianne.

'Oh no, they won't; they can't see me through the curtain,' returned Lizzie, keeping her post. 'What a swell he is, to be sure!' continued she (in allusion, it was to be presumed, to Mr. Scott, not the groom). 'Oh, what a light spring down! Miss Elphinstone would have been off without help just now, but he was too quick for her. It must be charming to have such a cavalier!'

Mama and aunt, who had been in another room, now entered.

'Harriet, my dear,' said mama, 'you cannot venture into the drawing-room, of course; you will entertain aunt till we return. Come,' she added to Marianne and me, 'you must both go up.'

I would willingly have been excused; entertaining strangers,

especially fashionable people like these, was not my *forte*, and I did not like it. But Marianne would not go without me.

‘Will ye no’ pit on your pink dress, Miss Marianne?’ pleaded Nurse, who had lingered to urge this; ‘ye look sae weel in’t.’

‘No, no, Nurse; this will do quite well,’ said Marianne, looking down at her pretty blue sprigged muslin, and shaking baek her hair. ‘Are you ready, Ellie?’ and we went to the drawing-room.

A distinguished looking company they were! The young ladies on opposite sofas; Mr. Scott standing at the window looking out. He came forward when we entered, and exchanged greetings after the ladies, with a grace that would have excited Lizzie’s admiration anew, had she seen it. Mama took a seat by Miss Elphinstone, and, Marianne sitting down on a low chair opposite, by Lady Charlotte, Mr. Scott, of course, fell to me to entertain, and I felt at a great loss what to say to him.

Of drawing-room small-talk I had no great range, even for ladies; but a fashionable young man! it was a trial to my powers scarcely less than my Sabbath class had been. When he compared me with the other young ladies, and with Marianne, whom I could hear running on with a continued flow of talk, he must have found me a heavy companion.

Miss Elphinstone was a tall, handsome, dark girl, apparently about Harriet’s age, and with a grand, haughty air, like her mother. Lady Charlotte was *mignon*, fair, and very, very pretty, but with a gay affected manner that I liked still less than the other. However, they were both extremely pleasant, as people can always be when they choose.

‘I feel quite a stranger in the neighbourhood, having been away so long; and Mr. Scott was kind enough to guide us here to-day, as we wished to call,’ I overheard Miss Elphinstone say to mama.

‘I suppose you have just come down from London?’ mama said.

‘Only last week; mama was fatigued, and we did not stay till the end of the season; but I had been in Paris for two

years before that: Lady Charlotte and I were there at school.'

'You will be quite glad to be at home again?'

'Yes; it is such a pleasure to be free, to do as one pleases! I suppose Miss Fitz-James will feel very much the same; she has just returned from school also, I understand?'

'Helen has. My eldest daughter left school about two years ago. She is not here; she met with an accident last week, which confines her to her room for the present.'

'I heard of that; but I had understood that it was nothing serious. I was under the impression that this was Miss Fitz-James,' looking at Marianne (as she had already done closely more than once since she came into the room). 'Shall we not have the pleasure of seeing her to-day?'

'I fear not. The Doctor forbids her to use her foot much; and she is still a prisoner on the sofa.'

'Your sister is not worse, I hope?' said Mr. Scott, who had caught this last sentence, addressing me for the first time with some degree of interest.

'Oh no, she is quite well; only she can't venture to walk much yet. We are going to have a *soirée* here in a week or two,' I added, not knowing what better to speak of, 'and we wish her to be well and able to be there.'

'A *soirée*!' said Mr. Scott, to whom the word probably suggested ideas very different from the reality. 'Where is it to be?'

I explained that it was simply a gathering of the parishioners to tea and strawberries in the schoolroom; that Sir John and Lady Maitland, Colonel Craufurd, and some other friends, had promised to come; and we were to have music and other entertainments for the children.

'Does Dr. Fitz-James preside?' he asked, as if by the way.

'Yes. It is to be on the 25th, to suit Sir John; he went away to London yesterday, but he is to be down again by that time.'

'Oh, I shall be down then too,' said Mr. Scott, as if he meant me to give him an invitation. 'I had half arranged

to go up again to town for a week or so, and I think now that I shall go—that is, that I must,’ he added, with a slight tinge of colour, as I involuntarily looked up at him.

‘I suppose you will be glad when the “Twelfth” comes round?’ I observed, to break one of those flagging pauses which had occurred already more than once during our *tête-à-tête*.

‘Yes, I shall. One feels at a loss what to do with one’s time in the country,—though, to be sure, it is pretty much the same everywhere; one tires of the same perpetual round of morning concerts, promenades, routs, and so forth. Don’t you find that old fellow hard enough to kill sometimes, Miss Fitz-James?’

‘No,’ I said, smiling; ‘I generally find the day short enough for all I have to do.’

‘Indeed! what amazingly interesting occupations yours must be! I wish you would let me into the secret.’

The words, though of a freer tone than he had previously used, were not spoken with any tinge of sarcasm—rather with a kind of impatient bitterness, and he visibly suppressed a yawn as he said them.

I was rather at a loss what to answer. He could understand our life, with all its home occupations and quiet pleasures, as little as I could understand his,—and where was the use of trying to enlighten him?

‘And are you tired of Dalmany already, Mr. Scott, when you have scarcely been here a fortnight? and it is such a beautiful place!’ I said at length warmly, surprised as I felt.

‘One grows tired of beautiful places as well as ugly ones if they see them always, Miss Fitz-James. Don’t you find it so? But what an absurd being you must think me, crying out about what can’t be helped, I suppose!’ he said, breaking into a smile that changed his whole countenance, and made him look still more attractive. ‘It is not so much that I am tired of the place either, as— Well, I must come and see your *fête*; that at least promises the charm of novelty.’

‘You!’ I exclaimed, startled for the moment, and not at



all relishing the prospect of this somewhat incongruous addition to our social gathering. 'Oh, Mr. Scott, there would not be the smallest entertainment there for *you*!—you don't understand the thing; you wouldn't stay two minutes'—

'Won't you give me the alternative?' said he, glancing at me with laughing eyes. He seemed suddenly to have changed his mood.

Marianne at this moment addressed some remark to him. He rose to reply to it, and stood leaning against the mantel-piece, talking to her and Lady Charlotte, and I was free to concentrate my attention elsewhere.

When the ladies rose to go, as they shortly did, while they were again exchanging salutations, Mr. Scott came forward to me and shook hands, saying, in a most chivalrous manner, as he did so,—

'Your sister must take great care of herself, and be quite well for the soirée. It would be a disappointment to—every one if she were not present.'

'He is very polite and kind,' thought I, glancing after his aristocratic figure as he was leaving the room. 'I don't think he can be so bad as people say; and yet Dr. Blackburn—well, it is very strange!'

Mary and Lizzie were both at the window, watching the party depart, when we returned to the room, and sundry exclamations of 'How gracefully she mounts!' 'What an elegant girl she is!' met our ears as we came in.

'Isn't it provoking papa happens always to be out when Mr. Scott calls?' said Marianne, when the horses and their riders were out of sight and hearing. 'If he would only send notice when he is coming,' she added, laughing. 'I wish papa had seen him.'

'He won't see him for some time either,' said mama. 'He goes back to London to-morrow, he says, for a week or two.'

'And, Harriet,' I said, going up to her (the only one who expressed no curiosity as to the visitors), 'Mr. Scott says

you must take great care of your foot, and be able to go to the *soirée* ; for it would be a disappointment to everybody if you were not there.'

'Mr. Scott!—what in the world did he mean?' (her start and sudden flush surprised me :) and then, changing her tone to one which astonished me not less,—'You were never surely absurd enough to speak to *him* about the *soirée*? Well, that is so like you, Ellie! Because you take an interest in those village affairs, you imagine every one must do the same! I am sure his cousin, at all events, must have laughed at you.'

'His cousin didn't hear me,—I was speaking to him,—and I wouldn't have cared though she did,' said I, with laudable spirit; 'and I can tell you he wasn't laughing either. It was himself who proposed to come,—I never thought of asking him; he asked all about it, and seemed to think it would be very nice,—and I do believe he means to come.'

'You *are* a goose, Ellie,' was the complimentary rejoinder.

Just then, fortunately for me, Tom came down from his 'den' to get his lunch and greet his cousins, which greeting, though kindly enough, was not by any means sentimental, any more than his welcome to me had been the previous month. However, it was 'Tom's way,' and nobody ever thought of taking offence. I had my own interrupted luncheon to 'complete,' and we had an hour's pleasant talk, undisturbed, before they also took leave.

'Put on your hat and come out a bit, Ellie,' said Tom, as mama and Marianne were again summoned to the drawing-room to receive some visitors (summer residents whom I did not know). 'I'm tired reading all day, and I want somebody that hasn't much sense to speak to, just for a rest.'

'I don't know about the sense,' said I, pulling one of his elfin locks, 'but I am ready for any amount of walking this lovely day;' and we accordingly set out.

'Such idle creatures girls are!' said Tom, shrugging his broad shoulders, as a hum of talking and laughing reached us in passing under the drawing-room windows. 'I don't believe they ever do a thing all day but gad about and write letters,

or jingle on the piano! I wouldn't have that, if I were a girl.'

'Nobody likes to *read* the letters better than you, Master Tom,' said I, laughing; 'and who did I hear last night begging for a song from Miss Craufurd? I'm sure I don't know what poor helpless men would do if they had not their "ministering angels" to cheer them on with their work, and keep them on speaking terms with humanity; and that they well know, for all they say.'

'I wish you could "cheer me on" with my logic essay,' grumbled Tom, who seemed to have found his powers not 'equal to the occasion' for that morning, and to be rather fagged and out of sorts. 'You would be some good if you could do that.'

'Well, perhaps I may, who knows? At all events, your thoughts will get the air out here, and that will be some good. Look, there's a hare!'

'Yes,' said Tom, his attention at once diverted; 'the guns next month will give the hares a fright; for, as Robbie says, "they'll tak' raal ill wi' bein' shot, puir beasts; for they havena been used wi't this while."'

How much good a real hearty laugh does one, both in mind and body! and Tom and I were indebted in no small degree to Robbie's 'last.' We enjoyed the walk. I delighted in the open air; and the country sights and sounds were still new and delightful to me. I enjoyed the sunny country roads, with their hedges and milestones and rural gateways, and the carts and people alike moving leisurely along in country fashion, and visible for a long way off before they finally disappeared, with now and again a carriage bowling rapidly on towards the Edinburgh road,—the birds also doing their best to add to the general joy, and singing their sweetest songs. By and by, also, with prudence and caution, together with an indefinite amount of 'petting' (which men and boys are alike partial to, though they don't own it), I wiled Tom on to bring his troubles on the *tapis*, till the mere talking over the subject of his essay, and explaining its aim to another,—even though

that other was a 'girl,'—made it clear to his own mind ; and, before we came to Colmuir End, 'Richard was himself again' for all practical purposes.

'Have you any fancy for seeing the chapel, Ellie?' asked Tom, as we came to a path leading into the Dalmany grounds, which the villagers were allowed to make a thoroughfare to the chapel ; 'I see it is open just now.'

'Oh yes, I should like it above all things,' I answered eagerly ; 'but will there be no risk of meeting Mr. Scott and his party anywhere in the grounds? I shouldn't fancy that.'

'Stuff!' cried Tom, with a boy's contempt for such punctilios. 'He won't eat you, I suppose, if we do meet him ; but the chapel's far enough from the road, unless you mean to put up a flag to draw attention.'

Accordingly we left the road, and crossed the rustic bridge over the sparkling water, leaping and dancing underneath to its own music, and up the fern-clad and daisy-spangled bank, to the noble pile which so forcibly spoke of the past—for, as I said before, it stood on the site and on the ruins of Queen Mary's own chapel, and to me was most interesting on that account. I had never been so near this spot before (it was the family burying-place, and on that account had, until recently, been kept sacred from intrusion), and I regarded it now with awed and solemn feelings, which all the accessories tended to deepen. The stillness around was something to be felt ; the distant murmur of the river was the only sound that fell on the ear ; and a solitary crow, which had perched on a neighbouring cross (that stood as a sign-post to the chapel), but which, it appeared, could not even take the liberty to croak, was the sole indication of life about. Massive slabs of what once was polished marble, each surmounted by a crucifix of the same material, and bearing a hardly legible inscription, point out the last resting-place of the chiefs of Dalmany for many generations, and crave for them a devotional charity which sadly jarred on my unaccustomed eyes—*i.e.* the prayers of the passers-by for the peace of those who rested beneath.

'This old place reminds me so much of the one at Holyrood,'

I said, after a long silence ; while Tom, untouched by sentiment, was leaning over the wall, gazing at the village through his pocket-telescope.

‘Well, it’s not unlike,’ graciously assented Tom, as he replaced the telescope in its case. ‘It’s as Popish a looking place as you will see anywhere. But come, Ellie,—if you are going into the chapel, we must be quick.’

We went in accordingly, under the ponderous and solemn doorway, which authorities pronounced to be beyond criticism, gazing with—I must confess—very ignorant wonder at the painted windows, which had also been pronounced gems in their way, the altar, the candlesticks, the screen,—all of which were as new to me as the building itself. Two young ladies, whom I recognised as recent ‘acquisitions’ to the chapel, were engaged wreathing flowers round the ‘screen,’ upon which the figures of the Saviour, of Mary, and of the Apostle Peter, in exquisite art, were apparent through the gauzy curtain that hung in front. At a little distance from the door, two gardener lads, bearing bouquets, who seemed to have just entered, were taking directions apparently from a gentleman who stood near, and whom I did not need Tom’s whisper to recognise as Mr. Charteris. As we entered, this gentleman turned round, and, not greatly to Tom’s gratification, saluted him with,—

‘Mr. Fitz-James!’ in accents of considerable astonishment; ‘I am delighted to see you here.’

Tom explained that we had intruded without being aware any one was within ; and we were again assured of Mr. Charteris’ extreme gratification at meeting with us. He was a gentlemanly, pleasant man. Whatever qualities he might be deficient in, politeness was certainly not one ; and we were taken about, and everything pointed out to us, with an *empressement* of attention that could not have been exceeded had we been his dearest and most esteemed friends,—the beautiful architecture, which he explained to us with an antiquary’s enthusiasm, but which we, alas ! were too ignorant of art to appreciate, though we could, and did admire it, as

well as the other things we were shown,—the paintings, the richly chased plate, the altar-cloth, with its gold embroidery, and the priest's robing-room (which to my inexperienced eyes seemed to present nothing but a confused heap of millinery). I am sure he must have been fatigued by the number of times he had to pass the altar—each time with a prostration (I can call it nothing else) worthy of a Hindoo devotee. When he drew aside the curtain in front of the 'screen,' he and the others present, with the exception of ourselves, again bowed reverently. Surely, surely, such formalism as this (to say nothing of the entirely sensuous nature of the surroundings) must of itself have a tendency to draw away the mind from Him who regardeth not the outward homage, but who 'looketh on the heart.'

'Who has a nose to scent heresy?' whispered Tom, as Mr. Charteris stepped aside for a moment to give a direction. 'If all this don't savour of Popery, then I don't know what Popery is—that's all!'

"The highroad to Rome," said I, recalling Robbie's words; 'but look here! this is the Elphinstones' pew,—they are every whit as "high" as their neighbours, for all they say;' and I lifted one prayer-book after another, each more or less elaborately decorated with the symbol of the cross.

'I don't think they go all the lengths Charteris goes, for all that; neither do the Andersons,' replied Tom. 'He must be pretty tolerably extreme, when even the Bishop refused to consecrate this place; the clergy had to do it themselves.'

Sir James Elphinstone, I should observe here, was a rigid Presbyterian, and an office-bearer in the parish church; his family, however, were Episcopalians, and attended the chapel at Dalmany, though its extreme 'altitude' was said to be very displeasing to Lady Elphinstone, whatever it might be to the junior members.

'How much good might have been done with all the money that is sunk here!' I could not help remarking, as I looked round at the Dalmany pew and others, with their gorgeous appointments and symbolical decorations. 'I daresay it might

have built a new village ! and what was the need of a chapel here ?—there were not so many Episcopalians in Colston, and they could have gone to Edinburgh, as they used to do. Mr. Scott surely would not want a private sanctuary for himself ?’

‘I don’t believe Scott cares twopennee about it. I’ve a notion that it all comes from a totally different quarter.—Hush !’

‘Well, Mr. Fitz-James,’ said Mr. Charteris, coming back, and surveying his surroundings with evident complacency, ‘I flatter myself that you never saw anything like this before.’

‘No,’ answered Tom emphatically,—though not in the sense Mr. Charteris probably intended,—‘I never saw anything like it.’

‘This,’ said his reverence, holding up a paper he had in his hand, and submitting it to Tom, ‘is a prospectus of prayer (drawn out for the Colmuir End “Brotherhood”) for Union between the Churches of England and Rome, and the Greek Church. It is much called for at the present day.’

‘Do you think the English or the Greek Church likely ever to unite with Rome ?’ asked Tom, politely suppressing his surprise at this somewhat startling announcement.

‘It is a consummation to be devoutly hoped and prayed for,’ said Mr. Charteris, with solemnity. ‘The great vital point of the Church’s infallibility being recognised, minor differences as to doctrine and so forth are easily adjusted. Men’s eyes are beginning to open to the fact that there is no other safeguard against the surging stream of error—no other ground so much as to set one’s foot upon—than this of the divine and infallible authority of the Church.’

We made no answer to this, not being inclined, or, indeed, prepared, for controversy ; and then Tom made a movement to go.

‘I wish you and I could have a little argument some day, Mr. Fitz-James,’ said Mr. Charteris insinuatingly, as we took leave. ‘I am sure there are many points on which we would agree.’

‘I doubt that, Mr. Charteris,’ said Tom sturdily. ‘I suspect our best plan to agree is to agree to differ. But we are greatly

obliged for your attention. I hope we have not detained you from any duty ;' and with a few more polite interchanges, we parted.

'Tom,' said I, as we were again crossing the little bridge, 'what did you mean by saying you believed the idea of the chapel came from some other quarter than Mr. Scott?'

'Only that the Pope, or the Cardinal at Westminster (whichever you please), had a mind to try what he could achieve here,' said Tom coolly, laughing at my consternation. 'What with the troops of Irish those mills have brought over, and the High Church notions that have got in among us, no one knows how, Colston was a fair field for it; so Morton was sent down to prepare the way, and he has prospered, as you see. I have no doubt, for my part, that Charteris' pretended "new light" and his innovations, as well as the "restoration" of the Dalmany Chapel, and all the rest of it, was part of a well-considered and deep-laid scheme from the very first.'

'Tom!' I exclaimed, aghast, 'do you really think so?'

'To be sure I do; and I am not alone in thinking it either: papa does, I know, though he won't say it, and Sir John, and the Craufurds too; but don't be in a hurry to proclaim it, Ellie, till we are sure. *They* are cautious enough, and we had much better be the same.'

'Perhaps Mr. Scott may put a stop at least to the coercion that is being used with the work-people,' said I, catching at a straw. (Mr. Charteris' new views, the subsequent 'restoration' of the chapel, and the ferment these changes had created in the parish, had all arisen, be it remembered, since I had gone to school, and my alarm and indignation thereat had not had time to subside.) 'It is really most disgraceful. I can tell you he looks one that will take his own way, whatever that may be; and, at all events, he is not a Papist!'

'No; Oxford is a good way from Rome,—on the map,' said Tom drily.

We were just then passing through Colmuir End, a part of the parish which, of late years, on account of the mills, had increased to nearly three times the size of Colston proper, both



as to extent and population (the latter being chiefly English and Irish), but the tumble-down aspect of most of the houses, and the general condition of the place, all testified to the most shameful neglect on the part of the ground-owner or his deputies.

'I wonder Mr. Scott can pass this place, and see the houses the poor people have to live in, and not feel himself constrained to build new ones, or, at least, to make the old ones habitable!' I could not help saying, as we came to the lodge-gates. 'Look at Sir John's workmen's houses,—what a difference! and Colonel Craufurd's too. Mr. Scott's part of it is like a Popish village,—not the least like our own respectable Scotland. If I were he, I would not have that for another day; I would pull down every one of those pigsties, and build a whole new village—pretty cottages, with at least two rooms in each, and a little garden in front, like Colston; and I would'—

My projected improvements were here cut short, like many another Utopian scheme, as Tom suddenly recollected a visit he ought to have made to one of his Sabbath scholars, who had met with an accident at the mill, and whose house we had just passed; and, as it was doubtful how long he might be detained, and a shower was evidently impending, I left him, to hasten home as fast as I could, in hope of escaping it.

Scarcely, however, had I got half-way between the villages when the rain began; nor was it a light summer shower, which is gone in a twinkling, but what the country people call an 'even-down pour,' which promised to last no inconsiderable time. Here was a fix! My parasol afforded but an apology for a defence against the combined forces of rain and breeze, and not the shadow of a shelter was to be seen but the trees. I stepped underneath the branches of the largest I could see,—as I had too much respect for a new starched muslin dress to expose it to the rain,—and there I had every prospect of being storm-stayed for the next hour.

Tolerably secure, however, under this canopy, and in no dread of being late for dinner (papa's tastes not favouring country hours), I rather enjoyed this compulsory stand-still.

I always liked to look at rain, and I do yet, especially when it falls on green fields and hedges, compelling even the little birds to seek the shelter of their nests. Such a sight always carries my thoughts upwards,—upwards, far more effectually than all the ‘lights’ and ‘pointed’ architecture of Mr. Charteris’ chapel. But this by the way.

I had stood about ten minutes in this *pose*, and the rain, so far from abating, had begun to pour with still greater force, when all at once quick footsteps sounded along the quiet road, and a gentleman, under shelter of a huge cotton umbrella, came up at a rate of speed that only one other I knew could have matched. I turned my head in the contrary direction, to avoid a recognition which, under the circumstances (my dress regularly turned over my shoulders as it was), did not seem particularly desirable. But it was one who always had his eyes about him—whom nothing could escape; and presently I heard the footsteps stayed, and then,—

‘Miss Helen!’ in accents of extreme surprise.

‘Oh, Dr. Blackburn!’ cried I, laughing, as I was obliged unwillingly to show my face, at the same time letting my dress fall considerably; ‘I knew it could only be papa or you; nobody else flies as if there were a house on fire somewhere.’

‘A pretty reception to give “papa or me,”—to show them only the side of your hat! But come, you have stood long enough here!’

He held the umbrella close to the tree, and, drawing my hand within his arm, with a gentle kindness peculiarly his own, we walked on.

It was the first time I had been alone with him since the night Mr. Scott and he had met, and I felt slightly embarrassed for a minute or so; but I need not have been. Men have an enviable power of controlling their feelings upon occasion, which we poor women sadly want. Whatever secret grief or cure Dr. Blackburn might have, nothing was suffered to appear. He was one of those rare natures with whom one quickly feels at home; or, as Marianne expressed it, ‘As if we had known him always;’ and as we walked along now, under shelter of

the huge umbrella, my hand resting upon his arm, I would hardly have believed, had I remembered it, that one short fortnight ago I had never heard his voice. But friendship, like affection, is not a thing of time.

His very first words were far enough away from all embarrassing subjects.

‘A delightful day this, Miss Helen!’

The rain was just then pouring down like a waterspout, and we plodding through it (I with my dress tucked up and clinging about me like a drowned crow) must have made an enlivening picture!

‘I like it, of all things,’ laughed I; ‘but I don’t know what Nurse will say to me for spoiling all her work,’ pointing to my dripping flounces. ‘Tom will have escaped all this: he left me at Colmuir End, to visit little Willie Harper, who had his arm broken at the mill last week.’

‘Ah, yes, poor little fellow! but he is doing well again.’

I told him of our visit to the chapel, and of Mr. Charteris’ politeness in showing us everything.

‘Mr. Charteris seems to think we Scottish people are not very easily impressed—by *seeing*, at all events,’ I added. ‘He said to Tom, as he was showing us the “screen” (and really it is magnificent!), that it would take Sydney Smith’s famous operation to make an impression on a Scotchman.’

‘No doubt he finds it so,’ said Dr. Blackburn, smiling. ‘Scotchmen of our friend Robbie Gourlay’s stamp are likely to be impressed the wrong way by the sight of candles burning in the sunshine, and the other accompaniments of a similar sort Mr. Charteris has grouped about him.’

‘Robbie thinks him an out-and-out Papist, for all he says,’ proceeded I (bringing out my fears ‘all of a heap,’ in hope of having them dispelled), ‘and Tom seems to agree with him; what do you think, Dr. Blackburn?’

‘I think it by no means unlikely.’

The confirmation quite took away my breath. Papists to have actually obtained a ‘local habitation’ in Colston! It was worse than my worst fears had ever pointed at.

‘He stoutly asserts himself to be a Protestant clergyman, and Mr. Morton as indignantly scouts the idea that *he* would tolerate anything else,’ I said, after a pause of consternation. ‘Can it be possible that they are really Papists? and yet it is not so very extraordinary either: old Mr. Scott was next thing to a Papist latterly, and he brought Mr. Morton here; the only wonder is that he has been so long in throwing off the mask.’

‘He does not throw it off yet, by any means; don’t fancy that, Miss Helen. He would probably chime in at this moment with all you could say against Popery, and at the same time gain a clue for his own ends from the talk. He knows what he is about.’

I remembered the ‘talk’ Mr. Morton and I had had in Princes Street, the day I came home, and I wondered what ‘clue’ he could possibly have gained from that, or what good.

‘I can’t believe that Popery—real, actual Popery—will ever spread very far in Colston, with all Mr. Morton’s efforts, or Mr. Scott’s either,’ I could not help observing. ‘Those pictures and ceremonies that they have at the chapel are more like children’s play than for grown-up people. Can you imagine men and women being really attracted by such things, Dr. Blackburn?’

‘It is certainly difficult; but we cannot doubt the fact that these things do possess an influence over some minds, not unlike the effect of intoxicating drinks; let a craving for either once begin, and it seems next to impossible to put a stop to it.’

‘And can nothing be done?’ I asked breathlessly. (Papists had been my bugbear ever since I could remember; Nurse’s tales of old—of burnings and horrors caused by them—had indoctrinated me with a wholesome terror of them; and to think of their lurking *sub rosa*, as it were, at our very door!) ‘Surely they are not to be allowed to carry all before them, as these people always do, when they have once gained a footing?’

‘A great deal may be done,’ said Dr. Blackburn, in that

kind, cheerful tone that always seemed to nerve me to any effort. 'You are doing your part now, Miss Helen, in training the young idea. It is in that our chief defence lies: influence them—the rising generation; train them in Scripture truth, and they will do the rest.'

I resolved anew that no effort on my part should be wanting to guard my sheep from the wolf, if that would do.

'You don't know how you have cheered me, Doctor,' I said, looking up to him with a smile.

'And you don't know how you cheer me by saying so,' he answered warmly, and kindly pressing my hand as it lay on his arm; adding, after a pause,—'Those parish ministrations and my profession are my chief enjoyments now.'

What did he mean? I could not guess, in the remotest degree; nor did I like to take any notice of a remark that seemed half involuntary.

'It is well you like it, Dr. Blackburn,' I ventured at last to say. 'I don't know what papa would do without you in these times,—you have done a great deal for the parish.'

He made no reply but by a second warm pressure, that said more than any words could have done, and we walked on for some minutes in silence.

'I am glad papa has begun that course of lectures on "Primitive Christianity,"' I said, partly to break the pause. 'There is nothing like going to the fountain-head for supplies. Did you hear Robbie's estimate of the lectures? Nurse was telling us last night that he was proclaiming everywhere that "he never was sae pleased wi' naething. They had dune mair to thin the chapel than onything else could hae dune."''

'A good many are of Robbie's opinion,' said Dr. Blackburn, with a smile. 'It is really most encouraging to see how the people turn out. There was hardly standing-room in the place last night.'

The summer shower had gone off when we entered the village, and the sun came forth again, in all his glory, from his veil of clouds. Dr. Blackburn put down the huge umbrella (borrowed from some 'guidwife' at Colmuir End), and I with-

drew my hand from his arm and allowed my dress to drop into its proper position,—‘the rain was over and gone!’

Many of the ‘guidwives’ of Colston were standing at their doors enjoying the ‘blink’ as we passed,—each dropping her curtsy to the Doctor, with the same reverence as to ‘the minister’s sel’,’ and the other magnates of the place; and numbers of little children, not of an age to be at school, were paddling about like ducks in the little pools by the roadside. Dr. Blackburn had a pleasant word or a kindly greeting for every one; and I no longer wondered at the unbounded popularity I had heard he possessed among them.

‘How is the cough, Johnnie?’ said the Doctor, patting a little curly-headed ‘three-year-old,’ who was sunning himself full length on the door-step, by his mother’s chair,—a baby-brother tumbling alongside of him at her feet, as she was busied with her needlework.

‘No betta,’ lisped Johnnie, shaking his head, at the same time kicking merrily with his heels against the door.

‘Eh! hoo daur ye say that?’ exclaimed his parent, administering a rebuke in the shape of sundry ‘cuffs,’ as she curtsied to the Doctor. ‘Mony thanks, sir,—the cauld’s clean gane; but he’ll say onything to get sweeties,—he’s uae conscience.’

Dr. Blackburn laughed, and promised Johnnie some more sugar-candy next time he passed, even though the cough was away.

‘No wonder Johnnie’s cough is long of getting better when the remedy is so pleasant,’ said I, laughing, as we came to the green gates of Colston Lodge (the Doctor’s residence), a square white house, standing in the midst of a pretty lawn interspersed with bright plots of flowers, about a stone’s-cast from the village, and with a luxuriant little garden behind. Jenny, in a gown of about three yards’ width, appeared at the door, in the act of placing some geraniums in the sunshine, which she had apparently taken indoors during the rain.

‘You are not coming any farther, Doctor,’ I said, as he was about to pass the gate.

‘I shall see you home.’

‘No, indeed—you have enough walking without that ; I won’t allow it, Dr. Blackburn ;’ and I laughingly held out my hand.

How the point might have been settled, however, I do not know, had not Jenny at this moment caught sight of us, and hailed the Doctor with the tidings that he was wanted ‘instantly’ at the Kinleith paper-mill, where there had been an accident.

‘Oh, I’m so sorry for having detained you on the road !’ I exclaimed, with heartfelt regret.

‘That was not your fault, Miss Helen,’ he said, as he hurriedly shook hands and went off at a pace that promised to make up for lost time.

‘Will ye no’ come in for a minute and tak’ a look at the flures, Miss Heelen ?’ said Jenny hospitably. ‘Robbie has them in grand order the noo.’

This was a most surprisingly gracious invitation for Jenny to give, as, like most bachelor’s housekeepers, she had a great jealousy of young ladies, and liked to keep them at a safe distance from her master. It was to be inferred, therefore, that she was not afraid of me, and the idea was not too flattering.

‘No, thank you, Jenny, not to-day,’ I answered. ‘I must hurry home to dinner ;’ and, gratifying her by bestowing an admiring glance at the flowers, I wished her good-bye, and reached home just two minutes after dinner had been served up, and only a short time after the Miss Craufurds, who had called for me, had taken leave. So much for idle girls !





## CHAPTER VII.

### CONFIDENCES.

‘Thy lot is the common lot of all :  
Into each life some rain must fall.’



THE above topic of conversation was unexpectedly renewed between Dr. Blackburn and myself the following week.

It was the Tuesday following our walk from Colmuir End, when Aunt Fitz-James, with Lizzie, Mary, and the boys, were spending the day at the Manse. Mr. and Mrs. Monteith had driven over from Strathie early in the forenoon, to take dinner with us ; and Dr. Blackburn, with Dr. Taylor, the venerable minister of the neighbouring parish, joined us by invitation ; so that we had quite a party.

After dinner, while the gentlemen were sitting at their wine, and the elder ladies enjoying a chat by themselves in the drawing-room, the boys and we younger ones strolled into the garden, to enjoy our dessert from the gooseberry-bushes ; Harriet (quite well now) was also with us.

When we had satisfied ourselves with eating and throwing gooseberries (delicious large ones they were, too), we adjourned to the summer-seat under the lilac-trees, in front of the dining-room windows, to have a talk, or ‘gossip,’ as Tom called it, till tea was ready ; and Harriet asked me to run into the house for her garden-hat, as the sun was scorching. When I came back with the hat, the girls were all sitting on the summer-seat, and the others standing near ; Dr. Blackburn had also joined them ; and the whole party seemed to me to have become most extraordinarily quiet. As I drew near, the



mystery was explained. Tom held something in his hand, which he was evidently about to read aloud; and I came forward just in time to hear a laughing remonstrance from Harriet, followed by the announcement on his part that it was a 'Popish Legend, suited to the times,' and by a noted Papist.

Before he could get further, I had sprung forward and seized the paper.

'Now, Tom, if you read a word!'

While Harriet and Marianne exclaimed,—

'It's really too bad, Tom; put it back.'

'Now, Ellie—well, if you like to stand handcuffed;' and, imprisoning my hands like a vice in one of his, he coolly began:—

#### LEGEND OF MADEIRA'S ISLE.

The foaming waves rose mountains high;  
The night was cold and dark;  
No boat lay moored upon the shore  
Save a frail and shattered bark.

E'en as the winds in fierce gusts swept,  
And the forest-trees bent low,  
They rocked the frail and shattered thing,—  
It shook from stern to bow.

Lo! issued from a postern-door  
Within the castle wall  
(The castle of the bold Baron,  
Cursed both of great and small),

A ladye and knight, in hot, hot haste,  
Forth to the rain and wind,—  
An angry sea before them lay,  
A cruel, cruel fate behind.

Down on her knees the ladye fell,  
Beside that surging tide,  
And vowed, should Heaven them safe transport  
To the kindly Northern side,

To raise a chapelle to her saint,  
With altar, book, and bell,  
And priest, to say the holy Mass,  
And lay the fiends of hell.

No friendly stars above their head  
 Sent down their beacon-glow ;  
 But the mourning skies wept bitter tears  
 On the raging waves below.

They launched their bark upon the sea,  
 Vowing in their hearts again  
 Rather to trust to Heaven's mercie  
 Than the wrath of cruel men.

And many a bead the ladye told,  
 And many a prayer she prayed ;  
 E'en as the waves rose more and more,  
 More 'Ave Marias' she said.

That night the boat had two sailors—  
 The morning light saw three ;  
 For a Figure sat by the frail boat's helm,  
 To guide it o'er the sea.

The winds were stayed and the waves were laid,  
 The fierce, fierce storm was spent ;  
 But no mortal knew whence that Figure came,  
 Or wheresoe'er he went.

They landed on a desert isle,  
 By foot of man untrod,  
 And, kneeling on that foreign shore,  
 They gave their lives to God.

When many years had come and gone,—  
 As I have heard them say,—  
 Where once the desert isle had been  
 A prosperous hamlet lay.

They built a chapelle to their saint,  
 With altar, book, and bell ;  
 And there the priest said holy Mass,  
 And laid the fiends of hell.

The ladye—she was the Baron's daughter ;  
 Her knight—Sir Ernest Steil ;  
 Their patron saint—the good St. Joseph ;  
 The place—Madeira's Isle.

'That beats "Lord Ullin's Daughter,"' pronounced Lizzie,  
 with a mischievous glance at my scarlet cheeks. 'It really  
 ought to be given to the world, with illustrations!'

'You deserve to be prosecuted for a thief, Tom,' said  
 Harriet, shaking her head at him.

'I didn't steal it; I found it in the writing-table drawer,' protested Tom. 'Some of Mr. Charteris' lucubrations, of course. What's all the row about?'

'Whoever the "Great Unknown" may be,' said Dr. Blackburn, looking kindly at me, 'we are indebted to Mr. Tom for making it public. I rise to propose a vote of thanks to him for his admirable reading;' and he lifted his hat, with his pleasant smile, as he spoke.

Tom responded by pulling off his cap and passing it round in the fashion of a street musician, and was universally hooted for his mercenary disposition, while receiving liberal donations in the shape of leaves, gooseberries, gravel, and last, though not least, a large black beetle which Harry, first making him shut his eyes and hold out his hand, carefully deposited therein, and then darted off like a deer, followed, of course, by Tom and his *brother*-spirits in hot pursuit. Then there was a lull for a minute or so, as we watched with much amusement how quickly they all got over the ground, while the little hare, thoroughly 'game,' doubled and distanced his pursuers, and bade fair to win the day.

Dr. Blackburn broke the silence by recurring to the subject (not the merits) of the poem in question, remarking on the poetry of the idea, as well as on the deep-hidden moral that lay in all the old legends, from Cinderella downwards—betraying, as he did so, an intimate acquaintance with the lighter kinds of literature which astonished me, considering the little leisure he could have for unprofessional reading.

'What do you think of the happy pair themselves, Doctor?' asked Lizzie, who was by no means addicted to literature, turning the conversation to the more personal phase of the story. 'She would get a small enough *trousseau*, I suspect, running away as she did. Don't you think they would both repent the bargain as soon as they got to the other side?'

'Lizzie!' I whispered reprovingly.

But Lizzie was totally indifferent whether her interlocutor were a gentleman or a lady.

'Come, Doctor, confess!' she went on laughingly, shaking

her head at me—‘confess that if you had run away with a young lady in the same circumstances, you would very soon have grown disenchanted with her, and she with you. Love requires a good many solid accompaniments to make it lasting.’

‘Then it is not *love*,’ I could not help observing, *sotto voce*.

There was a flash in Dr. Blackburn’s eye, as Lizzie’s last remark was made, that surprised me, especially as I did not think the occasion worthy to call forth feeling of any sort. It passed away, however, instantaneously, and it was with rather a sad smile that he answered,—

‘Must I confess, Miss Lizzie, that there is no such thing as true and unselfish love in the world? Is it only in books that it exists?’

‘I must say,’ said Marianne, laughing, as Lizzie did not reply, ‘Sir Ernest Steil and his lady-love set out with rather a *cold* prospect before them. For my part, I should not have minded crossing the sea so much; but I should have liked just a little company, besides ourselves, when we got to the other side.’

‘Yes,’ said Harriet, laughing also; ‘one must think of such trifles as comfort occasionally, as well as fine sentiment; and the lot of such a pair of lovers as Ellie has described—I mean, as we have in the poem—is not very enviable in real life. The very thought of them gives one the shivers!’ and she shrugged her shoulders.

Whether she spoke designedly or not, I could not be sure; I thought she did. I thought, too, that Dr. Blackburn’s dark eyes were fixed on her in somewhat wistful scrutiny; and the conjecture I had before entertained—that he had become attached to her—became conviction. I could not bear that her words should even seem to him unkind, and tried to cover their effect.

‘You don’t think so, really, Harriet?’ I said, with a smile. ‘We don’t think of these things first, when we really care for any one.’

Harriet made no answer; and, papa and the other gentle-

men joining us at that moment, the conversation of course took another turn.

When we were called to tea, Dr. Blackburn went forward to Harriet, and gave her his arm to the house.

'He has not taken offence at anything she said, at all events,' thought I. 'Well, she is a fortunate girl.'

During tea the conversation turned entirely upon the affairs of the neighbourhood—Mr. Charteris and his 'innovations' being a topic of equal and earnest interest to all present; and various measures, offensive and defensive, were then and there concerted, which were afterwards fully organized and carried out. But of this more anon.

Later in the evening, just before our guests took leave, we were all (with the exception of Harriet) again strolling in the garden, waiting till the Monteiths' gig was brought round. Dr. Blackburn and I chanced to be rather in advance of the others, and he took the opportunity of congratulating me on my poetical effusion, which Lizzie had again brought on the *tapis* during tea.

'I knew that you were—ahem—rather "blue," Miss Helen, but I had no idea you came out in that way. I am very glad to know it,' he said, looking at me with extreme kindness (if he had been my brother he could not have looked more kindly).

'And I am very sorry.'

'Why so?'

'Because,' I said, as usual speaking my thoughts plain out (and this happened to be rather a sore subject with me just then), 'I know that gentlemen always laugh at the idea of ladies doing anything of the sort; and I don't like to be laughed at.'

I must have spoken in rather a pettish tone, for he looked at me with an amused expression that did not tend to soothe me. Then he answered quietly,—

'I am not one of those, I can assure you; and I hope, for the credit of "mankind," that the number is small. I hold originality to be one of the very highest gifts, as well for a

woman as a man—fitting him the better for his place in the crowd of life, and her to be the “guide, philosopher, and friend”—in short, the “crown” she is destined to be. “There are many echoes, but few voices” in the world, Miss Helen. It is, in fact, just the different degrees in which this power is bestowed, that cause the great diversity existing amongst people.’

‘But it is of no great use to a woman—at least, she can do without it,’ I went on, half involuntarily. I did not quite understand the mood I was in to-night; a strange, indefinite sort of weight seemed to have fallen upon me within the last few hours, which I could neither account for nor shake off; and the day did not by any means seem so bright as it had been, even though the sun still shone.

Dr. Blackburn would not admit the reservation. ‘It is quite of as much use to a woman as to a man,’ he answered, quickly and with decision; ‘and in both it is a talent intrusted to them, like other talents, for the highest ends—to be improved to His glory who gave it—who never gives *anything* in vain.’

The words seemed like an inspiration. His glory!—the one grand incentive to a rational being’s exertion—the one end that gives its true dignity and beauty to life; and in all my aims and wishes for the future, I had never practically thought of this. No wonder I had been feeling wrong. It was as if a torch had suddenly been held up to me by an invisible hand, lighting up all that had hitherto seemed dark.

‘Dr. Blackburn,’ I exclaimed impulsively, ‘how many things you teach me! I wish I could help you as you have helped me.’

‘You have done so already, more than once—more than you are aware. If I had had the same influence about me earlier,’ he said, with something like a sigh, ‘I might have been a happier and a better man now.’

‘You!’ I exclaimed again, in unaffected amazement, the words slipping from me almost before I was aware; ‘how could *you* be better than you are already?’

He laughed outright at that ; then, suddenly resuming his serious tone,—

‘Miss Helen,’ he said, searching my face with a glance that surprised me, it was so very keen, ‘do not *you* begin to flatter me ; but no—I see you did not mean it—I am a suspicious fool ; and yet—well, perhaps, I may tell you how it is some day, but not just now.’

He changed the subject abruptly ; and almost immediately afterwards the gig droveround, and the guests severally departed.

‘What a very long *tête-à-tête* you and the doctor have been having, Ellie !’ said Marianne, passing her arm round me, as we went into the house. ‘What were you talking about ?’

‘Oh, about that stuff Tom read in the garden—and other things,’ I added, not caring to be more explicit. Fortunately, Marianne, too, was occupied with ‘other things.’ She had her Indian letters, which had come that afternoon, to read more fully, and various interesting items of news to discuss with Harriet ; and I—I stood at the window, looking out at the soft July night, and going over and over in imagination the last half-hour again. Sunlight—roselight—was about me once more.

It was with me during all the bright sunshiny hours of the next day, as we sat at our work,—partly in the parlour, partly out in the garden,—busy with various article of *virtu*, such as a doll dressed as a bride, for the bazaar which was to take place the following October.

It was about me still more in the afternoon, when, something being wanted for the bride’s attire, I put on my hat and jacket and volunteered to go for it. What a delicious walk that was ! I did not care to analyze my feelings, or ‘search what stirred them so’ (perhaps I could not then have done so, if I would). I only knew that the sky had never seemed to me so lovely, or the air so balmy sweet before, and my spirits rose with every step. I was thinking, too, of a great many things,—of the ‘soirée’ that was to be, and the part I was to take therein—and if Mr. Scott would really come to it, as he had said. He had gone off to London, according to Nurse’s

report, the day after he had called at the Manse, and I wondered very much if he would remember anything about it ; or if he had found other things to put that and 'Miss Harrit' out of his head ;—a little time would show. But, above all these (recurring as often as I tried to put them away), came the words that had so strangely brightened me, 'You have helped me already, more than you are aware,' mingled with many perplexing speculations as to his feelings for Harriet, and still more as to her feelings towards him, which I considered to be the more uncertain. I could form no definite conjecture as to them.

Ten minutes' walk brought me to my destination ; and, after selecting the various items of tarlatan, white satin ribbon, etc., which I had been commissioned to get, I was returning leisurely homewards, when, seeing Mrs. Gourlay's door open, I went in to ask for Margaret, who had not been well the Sabbath before.

It was a cheerful cottage to visit at any time, for Robbie and his wife were industrious, careful people, and the two eldest girls were in good work at the spinning-mill, so that there was no lack of comforts about it. A mahogany chest of drawers and a neat little sofa, over and above the usual complement of cottage 'plenishing,' testified to a due regard to outward appearance ; while a nice little library, including many standard volumes, and hanging in its ease overhead, as well as the newspaper lying on the table, equally showed that the 'inner man' was not forgotten. Mrs. Gourlay—a good-looking, good-humoured matron, worthy to be the better half of Robbie—was busy baking the bread for supper ; the tea-kettle was singing on the hearth ; and a girdle of scones on the fire completed the cheerfulness of the picture. Would that every village could boast more such homes !

'Come awa', Miss Heelen ; I saw ye gaun by, and just wondered if ye wad pass the door again,' was my reception, as she hastily wrapped her large white apron round her hand, and thrust it forth to grasp mine ; 'an' sit intil the fire here. I'm just extraordinar' glad to see ye.'



'Thank you, Mrs. Gourlay; but I would rather sit here, I said, taking a seat at the little lattice, that was nearly choked with the honeysuckle and roses that looked in. 'Robbie might send those roses to the next flower-show, I am sure.'

'Ay, he's a grand hand at the flures! but, Miss Heelen, I think perfect shame for ye to see sic a confusion;' and, forgetting the flour on her hands, she whisked a hat and some white ribbon off the little table beside me, and deposited it in 'the room;' adding, apologetically, as she came back and seated herself, 'Ye see, it's Maggie's hat, an' I was gaun to pit the ribbon on't for Sabbath-day; but, 'deed ye'll think me rael wrang to countenance the like o' that vanity, Miss Heelen?'

'No, I don't, indecd, Mrs. Gourlay,' I said. 'If Margaret can get pretty things to wear, without inconveniencing herself or you in any way, why should she not? I like to see my friends prettily dressed; and the very Bible itself doesn't bid a woman forget her "ornaments."'

'Eh, but I'm prood to hear ye say that, Miss Heelen! for, ye see, faither, he's aye ill at the bairns taking up their heads wi' thae things. I maun tell him Miss Heelen's on their side, an' he'll no' say ony mair; but ye ken it's nae wonder.'

I was not quite clear as to the expediency of this opinion of 'Miss Heelen's' being reported to Robbie, although I retained, and still retain, the conviction that a taste for pretty things (of course kept within proper limits) lies at the foundation of many valuable qualities; for do not all the æsthetics of life depend in a greater or less degree on this love of the beautiful? and it is exactly the degree in which they differ as to this that forms the line of demarcation between the educated and the ignorant, the coarse and the refined. Let a woman once begin to take an honest pride in 'beautifying' herself and her house, and the course of improvement is begun. I well remembered, too, how the gift, long ago, of some wax-flowers for the mantel-piecc, to little Lizzie Harper, had led to Lizzie's 'taking thought' herself, and resulted in a cottage and little person that were the admiration of the whole neighbourhood.

I write this down here, because it all flashed through my

mind at the moment of responding to Mrs. Gourlay's last remark, uttered as it was with a half sigh.

'Why is it "no wonder"?' I asked, smiling, not taking up the allusion.

'Puir Katie! ye ken, Miss Heelen, it was just the like o' that nonsense was the ruin o' her. Her heid was fair carried away wi' vanity!'

'But have you heard anything of her of late?' I asked, when, after saying this, she came somewhat abruptly to a pause. 'She is dead now; is she not?' I added, with some hesitation.

Mrs. Gourlay shook her head. It was an unhappy subject this,—a dark cloud that lowered over the Gourlay family,—and it was the first time it had been touched upon between us. To Robbie I would not have ventured to allude to the subject at all; but Kitty had only been Mrs. Gourlay's step-daughter; she was therefore less sensitive, more especially as Kitty had not been brought up with her, but with her mother's relations in Edinburgh.

'Her faither will hae't that she's deid,' she answered, after a somewhat lengthened pause, during which she lifted off her girdle, and made one or two other arrangements, apparently in no haste to speak. 'Ye see, Katie, she was the very licht o' his e'e—he ne'er could see ill in her; an' though I whiles think he's maybe no' just as sure as he wad like to be, no' ane o' us, nor the neebors aether, daur let on that we dinna think the same.'

'But Robbie may be in the right after all,' I ventured to suggest. 'If nobody knows anything to the contrary, they have no right to assume that he is mistaken.'

Mrs. Gourlay again shook her head decisively.

'It's no' ma pairt to mint an ill word o' my ain guidman's flesh an' bluid; but I ken what I ken. *Where* she may be, dear kens; but she's *no' deid*.'

There was, of course, no arguing against this, nor was it for me to show any curiosity in the matter. I therefore remained silent, and presently Mrs. Gourlay resumed.

'She was a bonnie, genty-looking lassie (ye'll mind o' her, Miss Heelen, when she used to be oot here in the simmer-time?), rael like your Miss Marianne, wi' a face that garred folk turn roond on the street an' look after her; but they put her up to think far ower muckle aboot it; an' filled her wi' nonsense notions o' bein' a grand leddy, till the lassie's heid was fair turned.'

'And then she went to Lady Jane's?' I said, when she had stopped speaking, apparently in no hurry to resume.

'Ay; she gaed to Laddy Jane's (her auntie was leddy's maid, ye ken, an' needed help wi' the auld leddy); an' weel wad it hae been for her if she had ne'er crossed *her* door-stane. Ye see, I hae my ain thochts aboot it, Miss Heelen, that I ne'er breathed to ony mortal, and that I'm no' gaun to tell even you,—it's nae use pittin' ill into young heids,—but I tell't the Minister and the Doctor (my! but Robbie wad maist fell me if he kent); an', 'deed, I'll no' say but the Doctor thocht I wasna far wrang after a'.'

As she did not enlighten me as to what she had 'told the Minister and the Doctor,' I could offer no opinion thereupon, and we sat for a minute or two in silence.

'Mr. Morton asked me the other day if you had ever heard anything of Kitty,' I said, after a little, thinking she ought at least to know of his good wishes. 'He said it was reported in the village a short time since, that she had been found.'

'I wish Morton wad mind his ain business, an' let ither folks alane,' exclaimed Mrs. Gourlay, with a burst of wrath I did not expect. 'He's for ever meddle, meddlin' wi' things he has naething adae wi'. He was ower at the smiddy no' lang ago, asking the same thing—as if it was ony mortal concern o' his; an' there ne'er was sic a report that ever I heard tell o', unless o' his ain raisin'.'

'Bless my heart! what's the wife gaun on aboot?' demanded a good-humoured masculine voice I knew well. 'Eh, Miss Heelen! ye're no' gaun to rin awa' jist when I come in? but it's nae wonder, wi' the gudewife flytin' on ye that way.'

'I wasna flytin', Robbie,' corrected his better half, with

perfect equanimity; 'I was just speakin' aboot that nasty sneakin' cratur Morton, that I canna thole within the door; though ye're sae prood o' what ye ca' your arguing, that I believe ye wad hae him into the very fireside, if I hadna the better care.'

'Oh, puir man! it's no' very ill to argue wi' the like o' him,' said Robbie complacently; 'he speaks sic nonsense. I whiles wonder if he has a' the shillin'; he wants twopence, ony way. But, Miss Heelen, sit ye doon a minute, an' I'll tell ye a queer thing. I was delvin' in Jim Thamson's yard (ye ken where that is) yesterday was a week, when I sees Morton comin' broodin' along the road, the way he aye does. He didna see me for the hedge; an' I was jist wonderin' if he wad be gaun to see the Laird aff to Lunnon again,—when whae should come along the same road but the Laird hisselt, ridin' on his grey horse, wi' his man ahint him! He stoppit his horse whan he cam' up to Morton, an' bade the flunkey ride on. "Morton," says he (my! if Morton had ne'er seen the wrang side o' the Laird's face afore, he saw't then!), "what's this I hear about you requiring the people to attend the chapel, and discharging them from their work if they don't? You must be forgetting your place altogether, to attempt such a thing!" I didna hear richt what Morton said, though they were stannin' jist forenent the hedge; but it was something aboot its bein' a mistake, an' that he hadna dune that (which was a great big lee, for he jist did it). "I'll have no such doings here," said the Laird; "mind that;" so Morton, he said he wad attend, an' put his hand to his hat as ceevil's ye like, an' the Laird rode on. I thocht I wad jist keek ower the hedge an' see hoo Morton took his flytin'; an', Miss Heelen, if ever I saw a fearsome look on a man's face, it was on his!—I was feared to look at him. He jist lifted his hand this way, an' shook it after the Laird, an' says he, "Ay, my lad," says he, "ye carry a high heid just now; but wait a while, *my time's coming*;" an' wi' that he walkit away. Wasna that a queer thing to say, Miss Heelen?'

'It was,' I said, equally wondering, 'very strange.'

'Dear me, Robbie!' said his wife; 'what could the man mean?'

'Ay, dear kens that, only mair nor a heap o' ither queer things he does! but I'm prood to see the Laird has a mind o' his ain, an' that Morton 'll no get ridin' on the folk's backs as he's been doin' this while.'

When I again rose to come away, Robbie went to get a 'flure' for me (his 'flures' were worth having), and his wife took the opportunity of requesting me not to repeat, even at home, what she had said about Kitty, 'as speaking of it could do no good.'

'An' I didna get ye tell't, Miss Heelen,' she added, 'that her auntie's wi' her, wherever that is; she gaed aff frae Leddy Jane's (the place she's been in nigh twenty years) no' lang after Katie; so it's like they're safe thegither some place; an', ye ken, maybe I'm wrang aboot it a'; so least said sunest mended, Miss Heelen.'

I reassured her on that point; and just then Margaret and Sarah came in from the mill, bonnetless and shawless, in country fashion, but neat and tidy, as Mrs. Gourlay's children were safe to be, and quite ready for the evening refreshment of tea. Jeanie, who had been playing about on the road till the others came home, presently swung in after them, and all three united in urging me to sit down again 'for twa three minutes,'—a piece of politeness which, in their place, with the tea and scones temptingly before me, I doubt if I would have had the philosophy to show.

'Peace be to this house,' were the words that rose to my mind, as I passed through the little wicket (after duly receiving my 'flure'), and smiled back to the group at the door,—father, mother, and children. So peaceful, so secure it looked!—it was hard to imagine an intruder there. Yet one had been. Whether the last dread enemy, or an archer foe still, who could tell? I could not, and I turned my steps away.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### A COUNTRY WALK.

‘A pleasant evening this, a pleasant walk.



WONDER if anybody ever remarked how quickly the summer days seem to pass,—so much more swiftly than any other days in the year? I don’t know why it should be so,—whether the drowsiness of the air, and the varied dissipations of the garden, at this time beguile the silver-footed hours; but I know it always was the case with me; and now those July days seemed to fly away like a flock of passenger birds.

The 24th was Harriet’s (low be it spoken) twenty-first birthday, and we had for some time been engaged to spend the evening, in a family capacity, with our cousins at their summer lodging.

Delicious to me at all times, and above all other gatherings, were those little family reunions, where all are (supposed at least to be) ‘of one heart and one mind;’ and I looked forward to this with far greater pleasure than I did to a grand party at Sir John’s, to which we were also engaged on the Friday week following. It was the day before our grand tea-meeting, too, and we had a deal of pleasant business on our hands, such as wreathing flowers, arranging bouquets, and so forth, in addition to the less ethereal preparations, which also devolved on the ladies’ committee.

Papa being from home, we dined early that day, and then Tom set out for his usual afternoon ramble, promising to be at aunt’s in good time for tea. The rest of us also began to

prepare for our walk, for aunt kept early hours in the country, if we did not, and neither mama nor Marianne liked to walk fast in the heat.

Just as we were ready to start, the door-bell announced a visitor, and presently Betsy appeared, to inform Harriet that Miss Smythe was in the drawing-room, and had asked for her.

‘Provoking!’ exclaimed Marianne; ‘Miss Smythe always calls at such *mal-à-propos* times.’

‘How is she to know they are *mal-à-propos*?’ said mama reprovingly. ‘I am always glad to see Miss Smythe, whatever time she calls; but as this visit is to Harriet, on committee business, I suppose, Harry and you and I will walk slowly on, and Harriet and Ellie will follow, after she goes away. There is plenty of time.’

All very true; and Miss Smythe *was* a very nice person indeed, a most *valuable* person too! for, having only one bachelor brother to take up her time at home, and plenty of means at command, she devoted great part of both to the public good. Still, these considerations did not altogether reconcile me to going up-stairs to the drawing-room after the others had set out, and sitting there in my jacket and hat, when I wanted to be out on the sunny road; and though she was a dear, sunny, active little spirit as ever lived, yet I am afraid both Harriet and I found the old lady rather prosy this particular afternoon. People little know when they are inconveniently occupying the time and taxing the politeness of others; and as we, of course, had assured her ‘we were in no hurry,’ she very naturally took us at our word, and was ‘in no hurry’ either. Miss Smythe, at papa’s request, had accepted the post of convener, instead of Harriet, and there was of course a multiplicity of business details for the impending *soirée* to be discussed, till really at last I wished her at Jericho, or anywhere rather than where she sat.

‘I think it is sure to go off well,’ she said, in her sunny, sanguine way, when at length all had been duly talked over. ‘Did I read you the Doctor’s note?’ producing it as she spoke. ‘Here is what he says: “As for the instructions

you speak of, that is superfluous, considering who forms your committee, and who is its convener. All that is necessary is to provide tea and cake for three hundred, or three hundred and fifty persons, bearing in mind the service of fruit in the evening. For the other arrangements,—the hiring of the instruments, selection of the transparencies, etc.,—I hope you will trust all that to me,"' concluded Miss Smythe, putting up the note.

'But that is a great additional trouble to Dr. Blackburn,' said Harriet.

'Oh, the Doctor never grudges trouble if it is to do any good,' rejoined Miss Smythe, who never 'grudged' taking any trouble herself. 'I suppose the fruit comes from Sir John? What a pity it is that Mr. Scott is from home! he might perhaps have sent us a contribution, and not let the whole burden fall on one person.'

'Mr. Scott has nothing whatever to do with us,' said Harriet, with a flush, which Miss Smythe evidently took as a reproof for her greediness. 'He will keep his fruit and flowers most likely for his own schools.'

'Well, I daresay,' acquiesced Miss Smythe contentedly. 'If he takes an interest in them, it is quite natural he should do so.'

After our visitor had at length departed,—bent, good little soul, upon twenty different errands—to the baker's, to make sure the buns would be in readiness; to the wright's, to see after tables and benches; to somebody else, about the tea-boiler,—Harriet and I gladly took up our gloves and parasols, and, she carrying a large bouquet of our best flowers to present to aunt, and I a small basket full of the last of the strawberries, we set out on our walk.

It was a sweet afternoon, the sky of the purest blue; the trees and hedges in the loveliest green, contrasting well with the golden hue of the fields on either side; and every bird of the air, as one would suppose, singing and twittering amid the branches. Not being yet five o'clock, we had the road all to ourselves, and we walked leisurely, as Harriet, by the Doctor's orders, did not venture yet to use much liberty with her foot.

'I hope the flowers won't wither before we get there,' I



said, as we passed through the gates and down the 'brae.' 'You should have seen the rhododendron show on the 31st of May, Harriet,—oh, it *was* fairyland!—the colours of the rhododendrons were so beautifully blended, and the ladies flitting about in white dresses and coloured sashes, like fairies, and the band of the Life Guards playing exquisite selections from *La Traviata*!—I never saw anything so lovely!'

'Mrs. Lambert had no "Fellows" in her acquaintance when I was at school, you see, Ellie. It is very useful to have a friend at court. Only think, Ellie,' she added suddenly, 'it is almost a month already since you came home! it was the very day before that awful day at Dalmany.'

'Yes,' said I, looking across as we came to the bridge. 'There is the very bank you fell over. Well, Dalmany is a magnificent place; but I think I would rather live here, if I had the choice. It is more like a home than a great castle like Dalmany,' I added, as we passed Colston Lodge, with the afternoon sun shining serenely on its white front, and lighting up its windows into a positive illumination.

'Oh, nonsense!' said Harriet, also glancing across at the great turreted building, half hid among the trees. 'If Dalmany were mine—I mean, if we had it to ourselves—I would soon feel at home in it. I am rather partial to a large place,' she added, with a coquettish little laugh.

'I would rather have this,' I said, looking back on the velvet lawn and bright sunny plots—which seemed to me a very bower of bliss—conspicuous through the white rails of the Lodge.

'Well, Ellie, perhaps you may be gratified,' said Harriet, laughing at my admiration of the doctor's house. 'I am sure Dr. Blackburn would be delighted to oblige you, if he knew.'

'"Very like a whale!"' I answered, quoting a not very elegant aphorism of Tom's, and fixing my eyes laughingly on her face. ('She does not guess that I know what "everybody" says,' I added to myself.)

'It is *not* "a whale," I assure you, Ellie,' said Harriet, undauntedly returning my gaze. 'I thought last night, when

you and he were sitting ages in the window, talking by yourselves, that you would suit each other admirably'—

'Harriet!' I exclaimed involuntarily, and I felt the colour rush unbidden to my face, with surprise at her whole manner, and with a variety of other feelings which came surging into my mind at the moment. Last night! Well, we had a pleasant talk, and it seemed pleasanter to me now than even at the time; but—but there were many things still I did not understand—and I would not think more of that.

'Don't blush, Ellie,' said Harriet, still laughing provokingly; then, suddenly taking herself,—'It is very wicked of me to tease you, poor little Ellie!' she said. 'Aren't we having a delicious walk? the hawthorn smells so sweet!'

'I wonder if Mr. Scott has come down yet?' I said, to turn the subject into another channel—certainly with no other design. 'He said he would be here before our *soirée*.'

It was Harriet's turn to blush now, it would seem; and blush she did most vividly, for, suddenly as she turned away her head, I could see that her very neck had become pink.

'You are always thinking of Mr. Scott, Ellie,' she said (an accusation that was not a little astonishing to me). 'I don't believe a single day has passed since he went away that you have not been speaking of him.'

What I might have answered I do not know, as a sudden noise as of wheels approaching at that moment diverted my attention, and the next instant a vehicle—of that species which young men especially patronize, called a 'drag'—swept down from the Edinburgh road, and came dashing full speed along the road behind us.

'There he is!' I exclaimed, as I caught a backward glimpse of the occupant.

'Who?' sharply demanded Harriet.

'Mr. Scott,' I said, in a low voice, as the carriage dashed up, 'comfortably smoking a cigar—hush!'

'Nonsense, Ellie.'

No nonsense, at least in so far as that it was he, as was presently demonstrated. The drag passed us with a bound;

the next instant it drew up with a grand commotion that made the road resound, and Mr. Scott, *in propria persona* (*minus* the cigar), sprang from it. In another second, carriage, horses, and servant had disappeared, while he himself hastened forward to greet us, with an eagerness and *empressement* certainly flattering.

‘Miss Fitz-James!’ he exclaimed, raising his hat with the air of a paladin, while his whole countenance lighted up with animated pleasure; ‘I am astonished and delighted to see *you* here. Are you quite well again?’

‘Quite well,—a fortnight ago,’ she said, as she held out her hand to him, with a charming blush. ‘It was only a trifle.’

‘I am delighted to hear it,’ he repeated, retaining her hand considerably longer than the occasion required; then, turning to me, he made his salutations with a grace that left nothing to be desired, but at the same time with a *différence*, which it required no great discernment to see. He then turned in our direction, and saying, ‘May I have the pleasure?’—words that just apologized for the intrusion, and yet were so slight as to preclude denial,—he established himself by Harriet’s side.

‘Won’t you—take my arm, Miss Fitz-James? You must still feel somewhat of an invalid,’ Mr. Scott said presently, but with a degree of diffidence and hesitation which I was surprised to see in so very easy and *nonchulant* a young man as he had hitherto appeared to be. I had yet to learn that Cupid, like conscience, makes very cowards of us all.

‘Oh no, thank you, Mr. Scott,’ said Harriet, smiling and colouring at the same time; ‘I can walk any distance now.’

Mr. Scott said something, which, being on Harriet’s other side, I did not quite hear, about being ‘glad of course,’ though it seemed to me that he would rather have had it otherwise; and then there came a pause, which no one seemed to feel disagreeable but me, and which I could find nothing to say to break. I remember admiring the easy grace with which our unexpected companion sauntered along by our side, and gradually ‘fell upon conversation;’ and, the lead thus given, Harriet easily and gracefully chimed in, though I did not even

attempt to join in it, as it was chiefly upon popular entertainments, and the fashionable small-talk of the day, with which drawing-room artillery I was wofully ill provided. I remember, too, being amused at the open-mouthed wonder with which several of the villagers who passed us gazed at our aristocratic-looking escort, whom they evidently recognised.

‘London is very hot and dusty at present,’ said Mr. Scott, after they had been talking for some time on other topics. ‘It seems like a new and fresher existence to get down here among green fields and trees.’

‘You will tire of the green fields, I’m afraid, and wish for the excitements of town again, before a week is over,’ said Harriet, with a smile.

‘I think not,’ said Mr. Scott, with a glance at Harriet which somehow seemed to carry a kind of reproach in it; adding, in a tone so low that I scarcely heard, ‘This place has attractions for me such as London cannot boast.’

‘Oh,’ said Harriet, with a start, as it seemed to me, and speaking quickly, ‘do you like the country, Mr. Scott? The “Twelfth” will soon be round, to be sure. Is there likely to be good sport this season?’

‘I really do not know.’

Another pause, which I thought was never to end.

Mr. Scott broke it, just as we were coming to the bridge, by pointing to a farmhouse at the side of the road, asking me whether a range of cottages did not stand there formerly.

‘Yes,’ I said, remembering the inconvenience and distress the forced change had caused to the poor people; ‘Mr. Morton chose to pull them all down to build this house for a friend of his own. It was a very cruel proceeding,’ I could not help adding; ‘but that was nothing to Mr. Morton.’

Mr. Scott looked at me in an astonished manner.

‘I don’t quite understand,’ he said. ‘Is Morton unpopular among the people here?’

‘Unpopular!’ I answered, bluntly enough, and disregarding Harriet’s reproving glance; ‘they *hate* him,—*everybody* hates him,—and no wonder.’

‘Is that a fact?—I mean—I *beg* your pardon—can it be so indeed?—and I have trusted him so unreservedly! What an unmitigated fool I have been!’ he exclaimed, in a tone of frank regret which I was pleased to see; ‘but it shall not go on longer. This shall be looked into, I promise you, Miss Helen.’

We had now passed Mr. Dodd’s manse, and were walking leisurely along the quiet country road, leading in a gentle ascent past the beautiful and ornate cottage villa—standing amid extensive gardens and lawn, sloping down to the road—of old Major Farquharson (who had lived there since he had retired from the army, twelve years before, with his nephew and adopted son, Mr. Stewart Farquharson, a rising young Edinburgh lawyer); past Larchgrove (Colonel Anderson’s), to the top of the hill, where the turrets and gables of Hainslie (Admiral Scott’s) could be seen among the trees to the right, and then branching off in two different directions.

Just before we came to West Colston Cottage (where Dan, the Major’s man-of-all-work, was to be seen busy among the flowers), we saw Mr. Farquharson himself coming down the road towards us, from the little branch railway station. He was a fine, tall, broad-shouldered young man, very like Dr. Blackburn in form and bearing, and with the same coloured hair and whiskers, though as unlike him in other respects as one handsome man is unlike another, and with the same look of vigorous manhood, physical and mental, rendered still more apparent in him by the additional facial appendages of beard and moustache, which the doctor did not affect—nor Mr. Scott either, for that matter.

I saw in a moment, from the scrutinizing glance Mr. Farquharson threw at our escort, as he quickened his pace, and somewhat haughtily lifted his hat to us, as he disappeared within his own domain, that Mr. Scott’s presence was an unpleasing surprise to him, and that Nurse’s assertions in regard to *him*, at least, were not unfounded.

About half a mile along the road, branching to the left, was the farmhouse which aunt had taken for the months of July

and August (the owners temporarily occupying a small cottage behind). It was a plain but pretty little place, with sweet honeysuckle and roses clinging round the old grey stone walls (suited to aunt's not too affluent widowed circumstances), with the farmyard distinctly visible from the road, and a pretty little garden in front.

How one does estimate things by comparison!—though it may be that a false pride often determines the balance the wrong way. In any other company, both Harriet and I would have thought this spot the most delightful of ‘rustications;’ and I cannot say, for my own part, that I thought very differently now; but I could easily see, by her heightened colour, that Harriet did, and that she would willingly have passed the gate, could she have devised any plausible pretext for afterwards dismissing her cavalier. Mr. Scott was certainly a most embarrassing companion,—the more so that he never seemed to suspect it, but walked on in happy ignorance of all the perplexity he was causing.

‘We go in here,’ Harriet said at last, with considerable reluctance, as she stopped before the friendly shade of a tall shrub. ‘We are going to take tea with some friends who are staying here for the summer.’

Mr. Scott did not take the hint, however: he swung open the little gate for us to pass through, and walked up the little path, right forward to the door, to ring the bell. Most provoking it was, to be sure! for the one sitting-room looked to the front, and at the open window, which was close to the door, the whole juvenile portion of the company—even Tom—was congregated, looking out for us, and much astonished, no doubt, to see the companion we had brought with us.

As Harriet held out her hand to take leave, one of the flowers she was carrying—a pretty blue convolvulus—fell on the ground. Mr. Scott instantly picked it up; but, instead of restoring it to her, he quietly placed it in his breast, and turned to shake hands with me. Whether Harriet resented the theft or not, I could not tell, as she had vanished indoors without a glance round; but I had a strong suspicion that the

action had been seen by other eyes than mine, though the owners thereof were no longer visible.

'To-morrow is your soirée night, is it not, Miss Helen?' he said, as he raised his hat to take leave.

'Yes,' I said, half reluctantly. 'But, Mr. Seott,' I called after him in desperation, as he was actually walking off, 'it is only a parish tea-drinking—for the village people; I fear I have given you a wrong impression of what the thing is.'

He responded only by again raising his hat and smiling, and passed through the gate, leaving me 'thinking heaps,' sure enough, but resolved to keep my own counsel on that, and other things.

Lizzie and Marianne both joined us immediately in the bedroom, as we were taking off our hats.

'So,' began Lizzie, in her usual mischievous manner (Tom and she were true cousins in that respect), 'this is the way you stay behind to discuss business affairs with Miss Smythe! keeping our tea waiting an hour and more. A pretty story, truly!'

'Miss Smythe detained us for very nearly an hour,' was all Harriet deigned to say, as she stooped to pick up an imaginary pin.

'And where did you find Mr. Seott?' asked Marianne, not less curious. 'I thought he was in London.'

'We didn't find him; he found us,' I answered, not more disposed to be catechised than Harriet. 'He was driving past in his drag, and came out of it when he saw us, and walked a little way with us. It was just ordinary politeness,' I stupidly added.

'Was it?' returned Lizzie, with ironical emphasis; 'then I must never have met with it, that's all. So it's the fashion now for gentlemen to turn out of their carriages when they see ladies on the road? Well, it is very polite, I must say. But come, make haste, Ellie; I can tell you, aunt is angry enough already about your being so late.'

'Mama angry!' said Harriet, looking up; 'what about?'

'Oh, nonsense, Harriet!' said Marianne, laughing. 'You don't mind Lizzie.'

'We have had a delicious walk,' I said, bending over some fragrant mignonette in its painted box outside the window,

which looked into the miniature garden. 'Everything was so sweet as we came along to-night.'

'Company included?' said the incorrigible Lizzie. 'Well, my dear, I don't doubt it; but you and I will talk of that afterwards, when we go out to the garden. Come, Harriet,' passing her arm round her, 'your hair will do beautifully. Mr. Scott isn't coming to tea, you know. Come away to the parlour, and see what the others will say to you about all this.'

'The others,' however, had very little to say on the subject; we had had the worst of it already. Mama and aunt were 'glad we had enjoyed the walk,' and that was all; and Mary was much too sedate to indulge in 'teasing' of any sort. Even Tom was too much engrossed in looking through Cousin Robert's large telescope, and discussing some topographical point with him, to have eyes or ears for anything else; and the topic would have died away, had not Marianne, in all innocence, revived it, by exclaiming, as she arranged the flowers we had brought in a jar,—

'But where is my beautiful blue convolvulus that I put in for Mary's especial benefit? Harriet, you careless girl! have you lost it?'

The question was so sudden and unlooked for that I started and coloured as violently as Harriet; while Marianne and the rest looked at us both in astonishment, not knowing which was the guilty party.

'It was there when we left home,' I said at last; 'it must have dropped upon the way.'

'Or perhaps only at the door; eh, Ellie?' suggested Lizzie wickedly; 'but never mind, Harriet, if Mary has not got the benefit, some one else has; so it doesn't signify. "It's all one in the Greek," as Tom would say.'

I am sure I do wonder, more and more every day, how people ever venture to show any liking for each other in this gossiping world of ours; it is so intolerable to have every word and action observed, and talked over, and laughed at, it may be, as if one were a world's wonder for the time being!—it really is insufferable; and yet people have to pass through



the ordeal continually, and will, I suppose, to the end of time, and, like the eels, 'get used to it' at last, no doubt.

The rest of the evening was very enjoyable, every one contributing their utmost to make it so; and, as Lizzie was really a sensible girl in the main, no embarrassing topics were again introduced, either by accident or design. Even the threatened 'talk' in the garden was carried to no undue limits, and ended in a very merry gossip over old times. Mary, Lizzie, and the boys escorted us home in the 'gloaming;' and Mary and I had some quiet gloaming talk along the road by ourselves, which it would interest no one else to record.

The only allusion Harriet made to our walk in the earlier part of the evening was that night as we were brushing our hair before going to bed, when something was said in reference to Mr. Morton.

'I suspect, Ellie,' she said; that you have procured his dismissal for him to-night. It is almost a pity you spoke so strongly as you did.'

'Well, perhaps I spoke "unadvisedly,"' I said; 'but I'm sure he deserves to be dismissed, if any one ever did. I am glad of one thing at least—that I know now that Mr. Scott is not to blame for any of the harsh things that have been done in his name; and, now that he has had a hint, I think he is one who will follow it up. I am not sorry, on the whole, that he knows.'

'No; but I am sorry that it was you who told him. If Mr. Morton ever gets an "inkling" of that, he will always bear you ill-will; and I would not like you to be in the bad graces of a man like him.'

'I would rather be in his bad than his good graces any day,' I said, laughing; 'but I don't suppose Mr. Scott would tell him the name of his informant—he is too much of a gentleman to do that. I only hope he will remember the information himself, and look into things, as he promised; and, as Nurse says, "There's nae sayin' what may come o't."'

No; who, indeed, can tell the end from the beginning of any earthly thing?



## CHAPTER IX.

### PREPARATIONS.

‘And sometimes counsel take, and sometimes tea.’

**T**HE next day was the great day of the *fête*, fair and bright as pleasure-givers could wish to see. It was to be held at half-past six o'clock, in the ‘Society room,’—a large upper ‘compartment,’ running along the top of several houses, in the centre of the village, where the ‘carters,’ ‘masons,’ and other societies held their annual ‘festival,’ and their other meetings,—in short, the City Hall of Colston. It had been newly cleaned and whitewashed for this occasion, under the active auspices of Miss Smythe, and was now being decorated with flowers and evergreens, of which a large cartful had come from Woodlands, and a smaller though equally kind contribution from Colston Hill. All honour to the county gentlemen of a district,—they are rarely wanting in liberality when any call is made upon them for the benefit or the gratification of their poorer neighbours. Any deficit was to be made up from the Manse garden, from Major Farquharson’s, and by the other members of the committee.

There being no hotel or restaurant in the neighbourhood, where ‘soirées’ are provided on the shortest notice, an indefinite amount of labour devolved on the committee, and particularly on Miss Smythe—to say nothing of the share taken by the Doctor. We had been busy all the previous day, and as soon as breakfast was over this morning, Harriet and I again hastened over to lend our valuable aid. We could see through the open windows, as we approached, that Miss Smythe and

some of her sister-spirits were already there ; I verily believe that Miss Smythe herself had been there almost with the sun ; it would have been nothing uncommon—she would willingly spend and be spent in whatever she undertook for the general good. Dear old friend—gentle spirit !—who of all those about you that day, whom men's tongues might flatter, was fairer in the sight of heaven than yourself ? Minstrels have sung and poets told of lives not half so *great*,—*thy* praise is writ on high ; and when the time shall come—far, far off may that time be—*thy* monument will be in the hearts of those who live to bless thy name. But to return.

Miss Smythe met us at the door with a radiant countenance, announcing that we were now beyond the need of further contributions either of fruit or flowers, as a munificent donation of both had arrived from Dalmany about ten minutes before.

'I assure you I did not ask it. I never gave the smallest hint,' she added quickly, as Harriet's eyes seemed to make the accusation. 'I did not so much as know Mr. Scott was at home.'

I could easily believe that.

'The man came down here last night about eight o'clock, and they sent him on to me,' said Miss Smythe, leading the way to the side-room, which was piled with boxes and baskets of every description. 'He brought this note : isn't it exceedingly polite ?' and she unfolded an elegant little crested note addressed 'To the Lady-Convener of the Committee.'

'Mr. Scott presents his compliments to the Lady-Convener, and will be happy to contribute flowers or fruit from Dalmany, to any extent that may be required for the *fêtes* that are in contemplation.'

'I did not know very well what to answer,' pursued Miss Smythe, folding up the note, 'and Charles could give me no idea ; so I just wrote that we had already received a handsome donation in that way from Sir John, and also from Sir James Elphinstone, but that a small addition would be most welcome ; and you see all this has come,—more than double what I had expected ; greenhouse flowers, too—the others are only garden ones,—and Mr. Morton along with them, to see if nothing

else could be supplied! I am sure,' said the good old lady, as she bustled away to receive some fresh arrival,—‘I am *sure* I don't know how we are ever to thank our friends for all their kindness.’

‘Now I call that a decent gift,’ I said, as Harriet and I stood admiring the splendid exotics (certainly better suited to adorn the ball-room of a duchess than the whitewashed walls of a village club-room, but, as Nurse would have said, ‘aye showing the will,’—and I doubted not that on this occasion the will was equal to the power). ‘I am only a little disappointed that Mr. Morton and his principal appear to be on such good terms,’ I added, laughing. ‘He can't have got his dismissal,—that is certain,—else he would not have been in such a benignant mood to-day.’

‘Oh, Ellie, what an ill-natured speech!’ said Harriet, laughing; ‘he may have promised reformation for the future, and that would please you as well, surely.’

‘Well, I don't know,’ I said; ‘I don't think Mr. Morton *could* reform—the old nature would always be too strong for him; but of course I have nothing to do with it, one way or another.’

There was no time now for standing and looking: we threw off our hats and shawls, and followed the lead of the other ladies, arranging the tables and benches, festooning the walls, counting, cutting, and setting in order the buns for the children, etc.; and sure am I that no village charwoman at eighteenpence a-day ever worked with more energy and goodwill than we did during the next four or five hours. The ‘other teachers’ (gentlemen of Tom's standing and experience, —Colston boasted few resident of riper years) looked in upon us in the course of the day, and lent us a little assistance in hammering in a few nails, etc.; and Robbie Gourlay, at his dinner-hour, gave us essential aid in moving some of the heavy benches. Papa and Dr. Blackburn also paid us a visit in the midst of our operations, and were conducted by Miss Smythe in triumph round the room, to admire the preparations. They were the two of all the world of mankind whom Miss

Smythe revered the most. Had she belonged to a Church that Mr. Morton wotted of, she would have canonized them, and kept their images enshrined in rich diptychs for private adoration; and, as it was, I would not hold her guiltless of wearing their hair enshrined in the reverse side of her diamond ring! Well, 'be it a weakness, it deserves some praise,' and it is one I share myself to a large extent,—that of loving to treasure 'relics' of my dearest friends.

At four o'clock we separated to go home to dinner, Miss Smythe engaging us all to be in our places again by half-past five. Dr. Taylor and the other ministers who were to speak, including Uncle Maitland (who with Cousins Louisa and Marian had arrived that morning for the meeting), were to dine at the Manse at half-past four, and the dining-room was being prepared for them now. But Harriet and I were not to wait till then, and dined by ourselves in the parlour; Marianne and Marian and Louisa—dressed for dinner—attending to our wants, and talking at the same time. Then they had to leave us to go to dinner; but Aunt Fitz-James and Mary and Lizzie,—who were coming with them to the meeting,—arriving at the same time, took their places beside us. Then we had to dress—no very elaborate operation certainly, but still requiring time. Tiny gipsy bonnets of white tulle replaced our garden-hats; our pink muslin dresses were made so as to enable us to dispense with jackets in the tea-room; and with tiny bouquets of flowers as brooches, we required no other ornaments.

'Harriet, you look—lovely!' cried Lizzie, as her skilful fingers arranged this natural brooch, and fastened it. 'Is Mr. Scott to be there to-night?' she exclaimed, with one of her sudden thoughts, as she deliberately paused in her occupation for the answer.

'Mr. Scott!' repeated Harriet, as if she scorned the idea, though the tell-tale colour that instantly suffused her face and neck testified that his being there was not altogether a matter of indifference to her.

'Oh,' cried Lizzie, laughing and clapping her hands, 'I do hope he will come! I wonder whether Dr. Blackburn or he

will be the hero of the evening? and it will be such fun to see them looking daggers at each other!’

‘Lizzie, you should be ashamed of yourself—talking such nonsense,’ said her sister reprovingly.

‘Why should I be ashamed? Are men such vile creatures that they must not be spoken of? I’m sure they don’t think so themselves; and Mr. Scott is such “a very magnificent three-tailed bashaw” that really he is fair game—more so than even the Doctor; somehow I don’t think I could laugh at him.’

The Doctor, indeed! I felt as indignant as Harriet, and very glad when aunt, coming into the room, put a stop to Miss Lizzie’s remarks for the present.

Harriet and I were again at the scene of action as the church-clock struck the half-hour; but, punctual as we had been, Miss Smythe and the other ladies were already there—some giving the final instructions to about a dozen maid-servants (our own Betsy being one of the number) who had been enlisted into the service of the evening; and others superintending supplies of hot water for the great ‘boiler,’ already vigorously doing duty before the side-room fire. They were all in the best possible spirits, talking and laughing merrily, and all gaily and handsomely dressed. Miss Smythe was an embodiment of black moire-antique and lace—a dress equally suited to her years and her station; and the younger ladies, some in silk, some in muslin, flitting like butterflies through the room—some of them pretty girls too!—the general effect was very pleasing.

Robbie Gourlay had given it as his opinion that there would be an ‘awfu’ turn-out o’ folk,’ and Miss Smythe was congratulating herself beyond measure on the liberal nature of the ‘supplies’ that had come to hand.

It really was a pretty sight; the long room with its white walls draped with flowers of every brilliant hue; the platform, with its seat of honour ‘exalted in the midst,’ and its wreathed chairs for the speakers, while artistically woven crowns hung from all the gasaliers over the favoured guests who sat below; the long tables covered with snowy linen, with elegant green-

house bouquets placed in every conceivable space,—and I thought no one could fail to be pleased.

‘If some of the gentlemen had only offered their men-servants to wait, it would have been such a favour!’ said Miss Douglas, one of the young ladies. ‘I’m sure the girls will never be able to attend to so many people.’

‘Mr. Morton suggested that to me this morning,’ said Miss Smythe. ‘He said he could send three or four from Dalmany; but I thought it would be pleasanter not to have strange men about us. I am sorry if you think it might have been better.’

‘No indeed, you were quite right, Miss Smythe,’ said Harriet and all the young ladies—Miss Douglas too, upon consideration.

We now betook ourselves—we ‘seven sisters’ and our head—to our own special domain, the side-room, sundry portentous sounds without warning us that the company-hour was drawing near. There our instructions were once more gone over, and the order of the evening set forth; and almost at the last moment, just as we had begun to despair of him coming, Dr. Blackburn arrived in great haste, having only that instant, as he told us, been released from duty. But what a change his animating presence made in the dingy little room!—to one, at least, if not more, of those present. It was as if the sun had suddenly shone out from behind a cloud, and filled every corner with light, and I wondered how the darkness had been endurable before.

Dr. Blackburn, however, had not a single moment to speak to any one. He had to repair at once to the public door to admit the juvenile mob who had been stationed outside for the last half-hour, and had now become quite uproarious as the hour approached; while we, at the word of command, began with equal expedition to fill the innumerable teapots from the great boiler, and place them within the influence of the heat, ready to be lifted and carried to the tables.

It may be rather a childish thing to have to confess of myself, but I may as well tell here that by and by, as the room began to fill, I actually ‘shirked’ my share of the work, and mounted up on a pile of forms three or four feet from the floor, like the veriest child in Christendom, to the high little

window looking into the 'Hall,' to have a peep. I could see well, without myself being seen; and I was pleased—I was proud,—yes, without a single drawback—at the appearance of the crowd. Respectably, nay, *well* dressed, and happy-looking, they streamed in,—husbands, wives, and neighbours (the children having been safely bestowed previous to this),—with a pleased recognition to Dr. Blackburn, who stood at the door receiving, and took their places quietly and orderly, like self-respecting Scottish people as they were. 'A bold peasantry, their country's pride.'

Then I saw our own party, with Nurse in the rear (mama, whose health was too delicate to admit of much evening dissipation, alone being left at home, keeper of the castle), enter and take up their position near the platform. The Craufurds—the old Colonel, his lady, and daughters—came next, then Captain Smythe, old Major Farquharson and his nephew, and one or two of the other 'notabilities' of the place. Then there was a grand drawing up of wheels, a scraping of horses' feet, and a commotion as of something magnificent impending,—and, with a look of almost superhuman condescension, as if the *prestige* of the meeting were assured by his presence, entered Sir James Elphinstone, marshalled to his seat on the platform by old Watson the beadle, looking almost as solemn, for the moment, as himself.

There was a sound as of other carriages drawing up, immediately after this, but who came out of them I did not see; as, at this moment, the door of the side-room close by me was suddenly opened, and Dr. Blackburn came in,—a circumstance I was presently made aware of by the titter that went through the room at my expense.

Provoking enough it was to be thus caught,—mounted aloft, and in the undignified attitude of 'keekin', as the little village boys have it. I had never thought of any gentleman coming into the room, least of all him whom I had seen at the front door but the moment before; and if I had not blushed that day before, I did most thoroughly now.

He looked up somewhat quizzically as he closed the door,



but with an absence of astonishment that made me sure it was not the first time he had caught sight of me.

‘Shall I have the honour of handing you to *terra firma*, Miss Helen?’ he asked,—a proposal which was greeted with a most aggravating laugh from Harriet and the other girls.

‘Thank you,’ I said, with as much dignity as I could assume; ‘since I got up, I think I shall manage to get down again.’

More easily said than done, however, and I found it would be the more undignified course of the two to attempt it. Dr. Blackburn stood with praiseworthy gravity (though with inward amusement, as I could see), awaiting the result of my ‘explorations;’ and I had actually to be lifted down from my perch, like any little wild boy in the school, amid a fresh series of titters, and only just in time, as it presently appeared, to prevent a further *exposé*.

‘Don’t our village friends look well?’ whispered the Doctor, as he set me down on *terra firma*.

‘That they do; I am quite proud of them,’ I replied warmly.

‘So am I,’ he said, with his sweet smile, that always seemed to speak sympathy with every one’s feelings; and I saw that he read what was passing in my mind clearly as if it had been glass.

‘Any admittance, ladies?’ demanded a frank, good-humoured voice, as the door partially opened, and a head appeared. ‘Oh, Doctor!’ and Sir John Maitland, accompanied by some one (I did not at first see who), made his way into the room, stepping over trays, and shaking hands right and left with every one, whether he knew them personally or not. Harriet’s quick change of colour, as she stooped over the urn, enlightened me before I turned round as to who Sir John’s companion was, and also explained Dr. Blackburn’s sudden irruption. ‘My!’ as Robbie Gourlay would have said, what a place to receive gentlemen!

Mr. Scott—for he it was—shook hands with me, making a sweeping bow to Miss Smythe and the other ladies, who, with true politeness, pursued their occupations as if no strangers were present. Then he seemed to hesitate how to salute Dr. Blackburn,—a doubt which the Doctor instantly solved for

him by frankly holding out his hand, with some pleasant observation, which somehow always seemed to come ready to Dr. Blackburn. Whatever prejudice might have existed in the mind of either towards the other, both made an evident effort to suppress it on the present occasion.

I thought Mr. Scott was never going to speak to Harriet. Indeed he stood so long talking on altogether indifferent topics to me, that I, like a green goose as I was, began to wonder what extraordinary change had come to him since last night. But when Sir John, who had been talking to her, turned to address some laughing observation to us, then Mr. Scott went forward (not even waiting to answer Sir John), and they shook hands, without exchanging words, or even looking at each other, so far as I could see; but he remained stationary at her side, as if he had mounted guard over her.

I don't suppose he even saw the great black 'tea-boiler' that stood before them, any more than he did the other accompaniments, though I doubt if ever in his life before it had been his fortune to behold such a scene. Trays, with buns or fruit promiscuously heaped upon them, stood on the window-sill, on the tops of forms on the floor, on every available spot where a tray could be; while the intermediate space was occupied with teapots, and the walls piled with the empty boxes and baskets from which the confections had been taken. The floor, too, boasted 'streams of running waters' in all directions, and altogether it formed so extraordinary a reception-room for the company we were now entertaining, that I had great difficulty in refraining from laughing outright.

'It wants just two minutes to the hour,' said Dr. Blackburn, coming into the room (he had quitted it immediately after his greeting to Mr. Scott). 'Miss Smythe, are you nearly in a state of readiness? The Doctor and our other friends will be with us immediately.'

'Quite ready, Dr. Blackburn,' was the reply.

'Dr. Blackburn, are you any authority about tea?' said Harriet, reaching a small cup from the table; 'try if this meets your approval.'

She poured some into the cup, put in the sugar and the cream, and handed it to him, with a smile that I thought might have made it palatable had it been cod-liver oil instead.

What Dr. Blackburn's opinion as to the merits of the tea might be, however, I had no opportunity of ascertaining, as I happened just then to have occasion to speak to Miss Smythe at the opposite side of the room ; and, standing near the fire a minute afterwards, I heard Mr. Scott say to Harriet in a low tone that had a kind of strange complaint in it,—

‘Will you not extend your bounty, Miss Fitz-James? or is it only to Dr. Blackburn such favours are accorded?’

‘Oh no,’ said Harriet, colouring and smiling, ‘you may have some tea if you please, Mr. Scott.’

‘I suppose you are the “dispensing power” in this department for the platform to-night,’ he said in the same tone, as he received the cup of tea from her hands.

‘No—my sister is. I do not go in at all till afterwards,’ said Harriet, who had herself arranged this. ‘My post is here,’ and she pointed to the great urn.

‘Oh,’ said Mr. Scott, looking disappointed, as I doubt not he felt, ‘I am sorry,—I’—

And with that he stopped, probably as it occurred to him that the ‘sister’ in question might be within hearing (which she was not—Marianne, not I, being the presiding genius of the platform). At the same moment Sir John, who had been talking to some of the other ladies, came forward to propose that they should now ‘relieve the ladies of their presence,’ and they quitted the room just as papa and the other ministers made their appearance in the hall, with wonderful punctuality, and only about four minutes after the half-hour.

We then filed into the tea-room.

‘I don’t envy you your post, Ellie,’ said Harriet, as she shut the door upon me, the last of the retreating line.

Most probably she would still less have envied me could she have seen my position ; but I must take another chapter to tell about that.



## CHAPTER X

### THE FETE.

‘And lo! the board with cups and spoons is crowned.’



S Robbie had predicted, the room was ‘choked full,’ and the doors were closed to prevent any further admission ; but, the large windows being all open from the top, the heat was not so overpowering as I had feared. The platform presented a gala appearance,—papa in his chair of state, the huge crown of flowers hanging from above nearly touching his head—the ministers and the other gentlemen disposed on either side of him—Marianne the only lady in front, and very lovely she looked, I thought, in her white bonnet and pretty blue muslin dress, her fair, sweet face radiant with smiles. Lady Maitland, Mrs. Craufurd, and the other ladies, occupied reserved places behind. Tom, who had all this time been comfortably seated on the platform, had now to vacate, and take his place with the other teachers in attending to the children.

My place was at one of the longest tables, which was densely crowded ; but instead of having the tray in the midst (as of right it ought to have been), it had, by a happy contrivance of Miss Smythe, been erected on a little pedestal behind, where I could have ‘freedom of action,’ as she remarked. In default of chairs, a bench—capable of accommodating three or four—had been brought for me from the side-room, and on this Robbie Gourlay, who had arrived too late to secure a place elsewhere, was now seated,—‘by the Doctor’s directions,’ as with many apologies he informed me.

Sir John Maitland and Mr. Scott were walking up and down the long room, Sir John exchanging a good-humoured greeting with such of the people as he recognised, and it did not strike me till a minute or two afterwards that they were actually placeless, the seats on the platform that had been reserved for them being occupied by some ladies who were in Lady Maitland's party. I was wondering where they would bestow themselves, when the old beadle came towards them with a message from the platform, to the effect, I suppose, that room would be made for them there, for Sir John only nodded and smiled across, and seated himself beside an old farmer at the end of one of the forms, while Mr. Scott (requesting leave to do so) placed himself by me.

The business of the evening was commenced by singing the Hundreth Psalm, led by Dr. Blackburn's deep, melodious voice, to which all rose, followed by a suitable prayer from papa, and then tea began. A pretty arduous office it was for the next ten minutes, as I and my sister-spirits throughout the room could testify: and Betsy, who stood by me, had incessant occupation in handing the cups as fast as they were filled. Mr. Scott (though I could have excused his company at that particular time) proved himself a most efficient assistant, and, I suspect, was nearly as much fatigued with his exertions as I was. Robbie, too, in his own way, lent substantial aid. Dr. Blackburn left his place on the platform and walked about the room and amongst the children, to see that every one was attended to, and a very lively as well as pleasing spectacle it formed altogether. When every one comes disposed to be pleased, and to contribute his very utmost to promote that end, it can hardly fail to be a success.

When at last all the cups were filled—some for the second or third time—I had leisure for a little to look round the room. I wondered considerably what Mr. Scott thought of it all, and whether he had found as much gratification in the evening as he had expected. It must at least have had 'the charm of novelty' for him, and I noticed that he was observant of all that passed, as he quietly took his tea. A dialogue

going on just below, between two worthy artisans of the village, seemed especially to engage his attention. Whether he fully understood their dialect or not, he certainly listened ; and very different from the perfumed and embroidered commonplaces which he was accustomed to hear must have seemed the talk of these humble interlocutors, speaking heart, truth, and simplicity, as they discussed Church and State in what were meant to be *sotto voce* tones.

I stole a glance at him while he was thus occupied, and again I could not but confess to myself that he was a graceful young man, well fitted, independently of all his other attractions, to please a lady's eye ; and I did not wonder at—at any one being pleased. But Dr. Blackburn !—involuntarily I glanced at him as he moved about among the people, seeming to diffuse sunshine wherever he went, with his truly noble countenance, and the frank, sweet smile that lighted it up when he spoke ; and I wondered still,—I *wondered* how any one could even think of another when *he* was by !

Let no one suppose that my right-hand neighbour, Robbie Gourlay, had been silent during all this protracted process of tea-making. To be so was not in Robbie's nature ; and, though he never at any time forgot his own place, or the respect that was due to his superiors, still it would have taken an extraordinary person to have awed him into silence. He was indisputably overawed—as were the other villagers—by 'the Laird's' vicinity just at the first ; but, as he gradually became familiar with the position, aided by the influence of the 'cup that cheers, but not inebriates,' Robbie was himself again, and enjoyed himself and everything about him to his heart's content. Mr. Scott, it must be confessed, did little towards furthering this change. Not that he was haughty, or repellent either, in his manner to the old man, but (as I understood it at least) from sheer want of knowing what to say. The same dearth of all topics of conversation which always oppressed me in *tête-à-têtes* with fashionables, such as Mr. Scott, seemed to affect him in regard to Robbie Gourlay. When Dr. Blackburn, just before the proceedings began, had

come hurriedly forward to where we were sitting, to borrow Robbie's psalm-book, courteously addressing him (as he always did) as 'Mr. Gourlay,' I had observed Mr. Scott start perceptibly—why, I could not quite understand—and look somewhat curiously at the old man ; but the circumstance had produced no other effect than to render his manner even more distant than it had yet been, a constrained monosyllable now and again being apparently all he could find to address to him.

Robbie, however, as I have said, did not seem to take this very greatly to heart. He afterwards told me confidentially, 'that he saw the Laird was an unco quiet lad, but that somehow he didna think he had a haughty meanin' to him' (a degree of credit which the labouring classes are generally not too ready to ascribe to those above them, and which *I* was by no means sure of 'the Laird' deserving). He soon talked as freely as if he and I had been alone at the table, occasionally also throwing a crumb, in the way of a remark, to Mr. Scott, who sometimes did not even perceive that it was meant for him. Philosophize as I would, my seat was a somewhat trying one, and I could not help thinking how differently I would have felt had it been Dr. Blackburn who was sitting there. *He* would have drawn out Robbie's real gifts, and made him appear to the best advantage, and have entertained us both,—but of course it could not be helped.

'Tak' a wee bit mair breed, sir,' urged Robbie insinuatingly, passing the cake-basket to Mr. Scott, who had already twice declined. 'Ye suld be ready for your tea noo, it's that late.'

'I had rather not, indeed,' said Mr. Scott, with a bow, responding to the action rather than the invitation, which was unintelligible to him.

'Miss Heelen, *ye'll* tak' a wee thing mair ; ye've hardly gotten onything yersel' ;' and I, though altogether disinclined for eating, and nearly suffocating with attempts to keep down a laugh, was compelled to accept a piece of bun rather than hurt his feelings, which I would not have done for a much greater consideration. Robbie fortunately did not see the

other effect of his words, but went on, as he put his cup back into the tray for the fourth time,—

‘I’ll hae nae mair o’ that plash tea; I’ll just eat a bit mair breed; that will I e’en.’

This remark, which was of course Greek and Hebrew to Mr. Scott, had the effect of nearly upsetting me altogether—for the manner in which it was said was irresistible, as well as the words; but with a desperate effort I managed to keep my countenance—*till* the next time. Mr. Scott, in making some slight observation to me, relative to the previous month of showery weather, happened to remark that the climate here seemed to be very rainy, and Robbie’s *amor patriæ* at once took fire—or rather arms for the defence.

‘Ay, thae first twa three days were gey wat; but they were nae specimen,’ he interposed apologetically. ‘I’m sure I’ve just been ashamed o’ the weather since ye cam’ doon; but I think it’s like settled noo.’

This was the climax. The idea of Robbie being ‘ashamed of the weather’ so tickled my fancy (more especially as I could see that Mr. Scott also seemed considerably amused), that I upset the teapot I had in my hand; and Mr. Scott, who happened to be leaning his arm on the table at the time, received the whole contents in his coat-sleeve. Fortunately the tea had considerably cooled by this time, otherwise the accident might have been as serious as it was unpleasant.

‘Oh, I am very sorry!’ I exclaimed, springing up in consternation. ‘Is it scalding, Mr. Scott? What can I do?’

‘What is the matter?’ said he, laughing, and remedying the mischief with his cambric handkerchief; ‘you have not thrown cold water on anything, Miss Helen?’

‘But I am afraid it is no joking matter,’ I said, annoyed and vexed at my own awkwardness, and not knowing exactly how hot the tea might be. Betsy at the same moment arrived with a towel to repair the damage; but Mr. Scott laughingly waved it and the subject aside altogether; nor could all Robbie’s assurances convince him that ‘burns were rael serious things whiles, especially next day.’



Tea over, and the tables cleared, papa rose to address the meeting, and at the same moment a bench was placed at the committee-room door, inside the public room, for the young ladies who had been presiding over the tea-urn to come in and hear the speeches. I was sure that Mr. Scott, without looking round, *saw* Harriet enter the first moment that she did so, but I had no time to think of that just then. I was looking at the platform, and never had I felt prouder of my father than now, when he stood thus amongst his elders and people, their head, by 'divine right,' in holy things. Though I say it, that perhaps should not, 'his looks adorned the venerable place;' and it was Nurse's verdict afterwards, in reporting the mind of the meeting, that 'no' ane o' them a' had the look o' the Minister, *except* the Doctor, an' maybe the Laird, though she wasna just sae high ower *him*.' But this by the way.

Papa began by expressing his pleasure that so many had responded to his invitation to meet together in this friendly way. They had met for a little social enjoyment, as well as for mutual conversation on affairs touching the general good; and as (from various causes) this was the first occasion, within the memory of the oldest inhabitant, on which they had assembled, as it were, as a family, before proceeding to the other occupations of the evening, it became a duty, not less than it was a pleasure, to look back on the way by which they had been led hitherto, as well as forward to that which lay before them. All—high and low, young and old—were journeying onward, he trusted, in one direction,—with their faces Zionward. But, while different routes were supposed to be marked in the same chart, and leading the same way,—just as there were several roads, besides the highway, by which one could go from this to the metropolis,—as their pastor he would counsel them to 'stand in the ways' their fathers had trod before them; to 'ask for the old paths, where was the good way, and walk therein.' On this subject he had a few words to say: they should be very few.

'Our Romish friends,' papa said (while various surreptitious glances began to be directed at Mr. Scott, as he sat in his

place, leaning forward and listening as intently as any. Whether he was conscious of them or not, I could not tell; he kept his eyes steadily fixed on the speaker, nor did they once wander during the address),—‘our Romish friends may tell us that, if we would believe as our fathers believed, we must think with them—that theirs is “the old path;” but, my friends, there is an older path than theirs,—the path of the apostles and the prophets,—which existed long before the Church of Rome, as it now is, had either “a local habitation or a name.”’ Then, in a few energetic and pointed sentences, he proved how straightforward and safe was the path which Protestantism presented to the Church, more especially our own simple, unencumbered system; its doctrines those of the pure Word, unadulterated by man’s inventions; its form of government and modes of worship ‘founded on the Word of God, and agreeable thereto’—those which Scripture sanctions, and which the primitive Church possessed; and its pastors and teachers, as a body, sound in doctrine and pure in life. He exhorted them, in ‘thoughts that breathed and words that burned,’ to ‘hold fast that form of sound words’ which they had received, ‘knowing of whom they had received them;’ concluding with a very solemn charge, which he said he regretted the spirit of the times seemed to demand, to beware of that materialism that was gradually creeping into the Church, and would find a footing unless forcibly withstood—which exalted the outward forms, and was subversive of the very spirit of Christianity. ‘Will-worship,’ he observed,—and here the sidelong glances towards Mr. Scott became more frequent and universal; while, for my own part, I almost expected to see him rise and quit the room (though, of course, at a Church meeting he might have expected to hear something of the sort), but he continued steadily listening,—‘will-worship generally begins, I have no doubt, with a perfectly pure intention, but it ends in the most monstrous absurdities, and there seems to be no stopping midway. It is dangerous to multiply observances not enjoined in the Word of God. The natural disposition of the human heart is to idolatry,

gradual and progressive ; and it has been well observed that “a gilt cross on the Bible leads as an inevitable result—unless checked in time—to an image in the closet,” and ends in the grossest idolatry. Our reformers were wise to expunge both from our churches, though by so doing they have incurred the censure of “leaving the walls a little too bare.” They knew human nature. Once let men abandon their minds to the worship of the material, and there is small room left for the spirit. Yet religion is *altogether* spiritual, belonging to the understanding and the heart, *not* to the senses. The exaltation of material forms is nothing more or less than the growing up again of Popery, let who will deny the fact ; for, when formalism has once taken precedence of the spirit of religion, Popery merely comes to claim kindred with her own.

‘My friends, let us not disguise from ourselves that a great danger is again gathering round our country—a danger which has proved fatal to the prosperity of so many others, and was for centuries fatal to the prosperity of Scotland. “Romanism, which all experience has proved to be destructive to truth and morals, and subversive of the liberty, order, and well-being of nations,” seems again, through the extraordinary infatuation of Protestants, to be gaining a firm footing in our land—that land which our forefathers wrested from its domination at the cost of their life’s blood ; ay, even in our own very midst, it would seem this day to be boldly lifting up its head. We need not stay to inquire how this has come about—whether, as I have said, by our own carelessness and neglect, or by causes over which we have no control ; the question now is, how best to meet and repel this renewed aggression : for Rome cannot be satisfied with toleration ; it ever grasps at supremacy, as we have had some instances of lately among ourselves. If we wish to resist Popery successfully Protestants must lay aside all minor differences, all the petty interests of sect and party, and unite in defence of the faith that they have in common, of the liberties which their brave forefathers won for them, and thus they would repel the advance of their common foe. The Word of God, under the Divine blessing, has made

our nation what it is ; and we may rest assured that whenever we depart from that, we will sink down as fast and as far as we have ever risen.'

Papa sat down, and the mind of the meeting was announced, in unmistakable terms, by the thunder of applause that followed, the whole assembly simultaneously rising to their feet ; while tumultuous shouts of 'No Popery !' resounded through the hall ; and 'No Puseyism !' called out by one voice, was caught up and echoed by at least a hundred. The hearty enthusiasm of those exclamations so delighted and embarrassed me at the same time, that for some minutes I could not venture to look at Mr. Scott, who was most unmistakably aimed at. When I did look up, he was smiling across to Sir John, and bent forward to whisper to me,—

'Scotland is Scotland still,—ready to do battle for her own opinions to the last.'

I smiled also, but privately subjoined, 'Quite right, too—and long may it continue.'

He caught the expression instantly, and smiled again, as he turned away. Whether a slight, thoroughly gentlemanlike sneer did not mingle in some degree with the smile, was a point on which I had not quite made up my mind, when we stood up, for a little interlude, to sing the first eight verses of the 78th Psalm—the intense enthusiasm with which it was sung bringing the tears into my eyes as I joined.

Uncle Maitland spoke next,—an able and interesting address, in much the same strain as papa,—and then Dr. Taylor, Sir James Elphinstone, and others,—all excellent addresses ; but having, unfortunately, omitted to write them down in my journal, I cannot recall them at this distance of time.

Then the music class, consisting of the senior girls in the Sabbath school, stood up to sing. Some of them had really good voices, and Marianne and the Miss Craufurds had bestowed much time and trouble in training them. What they sang were three simple little songs—'Life's River,' 'The Covenanter's Lay,' and 'The Scottish Exile's Lament' (prize effusions of my own)—which Marianne had set to beautiful

little airs of her own composition, for this special occasion. I do not give them here, as any one who may wish to read them will find them in *Cassell's*, and other magazines of the day.

'Thae's sweet bit things,' graciously pronounced Robbie when the songs were concluded, addressing his remark to Mr. Scott, who courteously assented, fortunately for my opinion of his taste.

Tom, who held the onerous post of secretary, now mounted the rostrum, to read the report of the past year's work.

Many had been the charges Tom had received at home to discharge this duty with due dignity, as well as to adorn himself properly for this first grand appearance on any boards. Marianne had even made some attempts to curl his elfin locks, and Nurse to put 'scent' on his handkerchief, but he had repelled them all with great contempt; and they had been compelled to abandon him to himself—the worst fate, in their opinion, that could befall him.

But, to give every one their due, Tom really did conduct himself very creditably on the occasion, and looked well, too (though only a boy),—and plenty of cheering he received, as he descended from his eminence.

'Your brother?' said Mr. Scott inquiringly, as Tom returned to his place.

'Yes,' I answered; and I was not ashamed of my brother, even before eyes so fastidious as those of the Laird.

Then Dr. Blackburn rose.

What a strange feeling one has, listening in public to any one in whom one takes a deep personal interest! I hardly knew till then how much I cared for Dr. Blackburn,—for his credit, of course, I mean, and that he should make a good appearance, and so forth. And when Mr. Scott (who had been restlessly glancing round the room, as if in quest of a seat more to his mind than this) once more leaned forward in an attitude of attention, and Sir James Elphinstone and the other *distingués* on the platform disposed themselves to listen, I felt my face glow and my heart beat, as if I had been going to speak myself.

Never had he looked handsomer or more attractive.

Standing where the rays of the setting sun shone full upon him, his uncovered head, his face, and fine tall figure appeared to great advantage. As old Mrs. Craufurd afterwards remarked of him, 'He ought always to stand on a platform ;' and I doubt, indeed, whether there was another his equal, whether on the platform or elsewhere.

Dr. Blackburn began in a pleasant, colloquial tone, which was distinctly heard at the farthest end of the room.

He rose, he said, to add any little weight that word of his could give to the addresses that had just been given ; and he was sure that all true Scotchmen, of whatever age or rank, would henceforth feel themselves pledged, not upon paper, but in their own hearts, to act in accordance with them. It was by holding fast her national faith that Scotland, small and poor as she was, had risen to so high a place among the nations of the earth ; and if she departed from that, in however small a degree, she would find, when perhaps it was too late, that she had lost the true secret of that moral power which hitherto had made her 'loved at home, revered abroad.'

'My friends,' Dr. Blackburn went on, 'our Christian forefathers loved their native land, and fought and struggled nobly and bravely, in humble dependence on their Divine King, to make it such as they desired it to be,—a free, God-fearing, and "delightsome land" for their children and children's children to dwell in—a land that, under its Lord, might be a "light to lighten the nations," and which all nations would "call blessed." And their works of faith and labours of love in this respect have been signally blessed. For, whether it be owing, under God, to the teaching in our churches, or to the teaching in our schools,—both of which they established,—certain it is that we have prospered nationally in a wonderful way, as if the peculiar blessing of Heaven rested upon us. We humbly believe we see, in regard to the "land of the mountain and the flood," the fulfilment of the many gracious promises for keeping God's commandments : "The Lord hath been mindful of us ; He will bless us : He will bless them that fear the Lord, both small and great." "Happy is that people that

are in such a case ; yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord." "I will cause thee to ride on the high places of the earth, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

'My friends, I am afraid that for some time past we have not been doing anything to deserve the high place which the virtues and wise institutions of our godly forefathers have won for us,—we certainly have not been careful to follow in their footsteps, that we might retain those blessings promised to the seed of the righteous. Already, as our pastor warns us, we have by our own culpable carelessness and infatuation opened a door in more than one direction for the enemies of our country to enter in, especially one foe who suffers no negligence on our part to escape her lynx eyes. My friends, Scotsmen worthy of the name need but to be warned of a possible danger, to arm in defence. Let us take our Bibles in our hands, and into our hearts, and we will be able successfully to resist it, in whatever form it appears. Our gallant forefathers never permitted a foe long to retain possession of our soil, and, please God, no more shall we.'

Concluding in the words of an eloquent speaker well known to all of them, he said : "Think of the gulf in which you will lie whelmed if this threatened assault on your liberties succeed. It is not liberty only which you will lose, but all which the liberty of the past three hundred years has procured for you. Will you thus requite the patriots and martyrs who suffered and toiled to make you free ? Sons of Knox, and of many a martyred sire besides, arise, gird on your armour. Spread light—spread light ; educate your sons—educate yourselves. Tell the foe that *this* is Knox's land, and that the candle which Knox kindled here shall never be put out." Amen. And may God defend and bless His own cause.'

It was a solemn and heart-stirring address, and so breathless had been the attention with which it was listened to, that, even for some minutes after the speaker had resumed his seat, the silence might almost have been felt. Then the applause burst forth in a volley which I thought would never cease,—the entire audience again rising *en masse*,—and the hearty enthusiasm

of which brought the tears to my eyes for the second time that evening. I glanced at Dr. Blackburn to see how it affected him, and to my surprise found that his eyes were intently fixed on mine, as if he sought that look of answering sympathy which was there to give.

‘Ay, the Doctor yerks them up to their wark,’ observed Robbie at my side, rubbing his hands with satisfaction, when his feet had been well-nigh exhausted with their efforts to express the same; ‘there’s nane o’ them a’ can speak to the pint like the Minister an’ him.’

I hardly heard what he said, nor did I observe whether Mr. Scott made any remark or not; the words and tones of the speaker alone filled my ears, till Sir John Maitland, rising right before me to say a few words, awoke me from my trance.

Sir John was an immense favourite with the Colston people, and deservedly so. He was (as I have said) our county member, a Justice of Peace, Colonel of the local Volunteers (Mr. Farquharson being next to him in command), besides every other office of trust and responsibility that could be thrust upon his willing shoulders. He was an easy and fluent speaker, and in a humorous little speech, abounding at the same time with good sense and right feeling, he now begged to say ditto to all the various speeches that had been made that evening by his reverend, as well as his *ir*-reverend friends! He certainly hated the Pope and all his works with a thorough old-fashioned hatred, and he would join with all his heart in trying to keep him out of Scotland, where he once did mischief enough. He had, however, an amendment to propose on the address of his good friend Dr. Blackburn, whom it was hardly fair to class in the *ir*-reverend category, unless for his having so irreverently slurred over the capabilities of the ‘better half’ of creation, which he now rose to defend, if not with his lance on the present occasion, at least with the best weapon he had—his tongue! He could assure the Doctor that, in calling upon the other half *first* to bestir themselves in their country’s cause, he had begun at the wrong end; for it was with the ladies that the first steps in almost all great movements—in



any great social reform, at all events—must originate. In all our revolutions they have been influential agents; in all our courts—Church as well as law, even in the very highest in the land—they were all-powerful presences; nay, in the very framing of our country's laws, he was not prepared to assert that they did not *try* at least to render assistance! Get *them* to take the lead in any patriotic or philanthropic movement, and, depend upon it, the gentlemen would follow. It was a law of nature, as sure as that the loadstone drew the needle; and he suspected that his fair friends themselves were very well aware of their magnetic powers of attraction in that way. He was by no means of opinion with the good divine who remarks 'that women are at the bottom of every mischief that is done under the sun;' he rather held that they were 'foremost in every good work;' and all history, from the most ancient and Highest of all, down to the present time, would bear him out in this assertion. Of the human race it was woman who had the larger share of *heart*, the larger share of *soul* also—there was no doubt of that; and he greatly feared that truth compelled him to add, of *conscience* as well. In short, women had the superiority in everything but strength,—physical and mental strength,—and that they could very well afford to do without. And, chief of all, he did not need to remind a Scottish audience that they had been the tried and trusted friends of the Master and Lord of all; and that they had faithfully stood by Him to the last, when stronger adherents forsook Him and fled.

Sir John then, in terms that reflected the highest honour on himself as a Christian and a gentleman, adverted to several prevailing vices, such as drunkenness, the use of profane language, etc., both among the upper and lower classes, which were destructive to all spirituality in religion, as well as to all domestic happiness, and which it lay with the women chiefly to put a stop to, by steadily setting their faces against. And then, resuming his humorous tone, he said that although he thus freely conceded to them the power which was their just right, he by no means desired to puff them up with pride;

still less to incite them to 'usurp (undue) authority;' and he would conclude by merely reminding them—and their own good sense would improve the hint—that in the apostle's charge to husbands and wives, in his matchless homily on the relative duties, the last injunction was,—*'And the wife see that she reverence her husband.'*

'Dear me!' exclaimed Robbie, in the midst of the acclamation that followed, looking round in ecstasies, to catch a glimpse of his better half; 'what garred him gie oot that he was to uphaud the wives, puir cratur, gin he was to let them doon again like that? My! but the wife'll be bleezin' up like a can'le, to be tell't the like o' that.'

'I suspect Sir John has lost all the laurels he had gained by those last remarks,' I laughingly observed to Mr. Scott, who also was indulging in a good laugh. 'It was too bad to raise our hopes, only to dash them to the ground again.'

What reply Mr. Scott might have made to this it was impossible to tell, as his attention was just then diverted in another direction. Dr. Blackburn had, during the 'ruffing' that followed Sir John's speech, quitted his place on the platform, and that moment he crossed to where the three young ladies from the anteroom were seated, to address some remark to them—about the concluding arrangements, as I afterwards understood, and as I guessed at the time; but Mr. Scott, of course, did not understand that; and, as Dr. Blackburn stood leaning his arm on the back of the form, and bending towards Harriet, who sat nearest to him, listening earnestly to what he said, and occasionally making a remark herself, he was so intently engrossed observing them that he actually forgot to reply to my observation.

Lady Maitland now came down from the platform to the piano which had been placed alongside of it, and played and sang two of the grand old Jewish patriotic songs (the 137th and the 85th) with great sweetness and feeling, winding up (at the request of some of the old people, conveyed to her by Dr. Blackburn) with 'John Anderson' and 'The Land o' the Leal.' Marianne, who had a very sweet voice, and Miss

Craufurd, who had a magnificent one, followed, and sang several of Lady Nairne's beautiful Jacobite and other songs, to the manifest enjoyment of the audience; and when they came to the last verse in 'The Covenanter's Widow's Lament,' singing it together,—

' For he had ta'en the Covenant,  
For Scotland's sake to dee, O,' etc.

—the cheers with which it was greeted were positively deafening. Then Captain Smythe gave a sea song, which delighted the young people present; and old Major Farquharson, a Gaelic one. His nephew, Mr. Stewart Farquharson, who had the most magnificent tenor voice I ever heard, sang 'Scots wha hae' in a manner that thrilled the hearts of all present, and called forth thunders of applause; and, receiving a most vociferous encore, he next gave 'Rule Britannia,' to their no less enthusiastic delight. Then Sir John's song was called for on all sides, and he sang 'Home, sweet Home,' with his fine baritone voice, in a pleasing manner; after which Captain Alick Craufurd played some pretty airs on the violin, which wound up the musical performances of the evening.

It was now half-past nine o'clock, and the service of fruit (plenty of delicious strawberries and cream, and gooseberries in abundance; unlimited buns also, for those who desired something more substantial) was placed on the table, occasioning another busy ten minutes' work to the young ladies in the anteroom who had chosen that post. And never did refectioin give more entire satisfaction and enjoyment, chiefly, however, as Robbie privately informed me, 'because the ministers an' a' the gentry seemed to enjoy theirsels as much as onybody there.'

Then Tom and Ned Craufurd came forward to exhibit the gigantic magic-lantern, which was already erected, and all right to begin, and which was to conclude the entertainment of the evening.

At this point, Sir James Elphinstone, Colonel and Mrs. Craufurd, Major Farquharson, and a few of the older people throughout the room, took the opportunity of retiring. As Sir James and the other gentlemen were slowly progressing,

hat in hand, down the passage towards the door, the whole assembly (in accordance, I suspect, with a hint from Dr. Blackburn) rose *en masse*, and saluted them with a cheer, which must have been incense to Sir James, and which he evidently appropriated entirely to himself. Drawing himself up to his full height, while the others smilingly bowed their acknowledgments and passed out, he stood magnificently at the door till the shouts had subsided, then, bestowing a 'nod' worthy of Jupiter upon the room, he slowly withdrew.

The lantern belonged to Sir John, and was, of course, first-class, the slides being also A1, and well managed besides. The 'scenes' were finely executed views of Continental cities and scenery, and several of Egypt and the Holy Land, especially a fine view of the city of Jerusalem, which papa was particularly interested in, and anxious that every one should see to advantage. Altogether the exhibition was really something worth, and it *was* appreciated.

When the lights had all been extinguished for this purpose, and some of the people began to move into the vacant places, I suddenly discovered that I was sitting alone on my bench, my two companions having taken French leave, as it appeared, under cover of the darkness. I soon perceived that Robbie had joined his children, and was holding little Jeanie on the back of a form that she might better see the lantern. Whither Mr. Seott had gone, I was at no loss to conjecture; and a momentary flash from the lantern soon revealed him standing in the self-same position by Harriet's side which Dr. Blackburn, and after him Mr. Farquharson, had occupied a few minutes before.

Mr. Farquharson, indeed, had only just quitted it to make some suggestion apparently to those in charge of the lantern, and with the evident intention of returning; for, when he turned round after speaking to Tom, and saw how his place was occupied, I observed a dark flush mount to his forehead, and his lip curl with anger as he stood irresolute for a moment, and then resumed his former place on the platform. But Mr. Seott, of course, knew nothing of all this.

'All alone, Miss Helen!' said a voice I knew well, during one of the intervals of exhibition; 'it does not say much for the gallantry of your companions to leave you sitting by yourself like this;' and Dr. Blackburn installed himself into the vacant space.

I could have sat thus for ever, and 'ne'er have changed, nor wished to change, my state,' so unutterably content and happy did I feel! I could talk now, without having first to think what I would say; and oh, the pleasure—the *comfort*—of being with one with whom you feel thoroughly at home!

I made him laugh heartily at some of Robbie's observations, and Mr. Scott's mystification at the Scotch dialect, asking him also if he thought the teapot accident likely to cause Mr. Scott any annoyance—at which he only laughed, and said, 'Scarcely.' Then he began to talk of the singing—the songs.

'What do you think, Miss Helen!' he said; 'Lady Maitland thought the "Lay" one of Graham's, which she had not seen. She wondered she had not met with it before.'

'Dr. Blackburn, it was too bad of Lady Maitland and you to laugh at me,' I exclaimed. 'I know you were only laughing, and it was a shame;' and for a moment I really felt aggrieved—only for a moment, though.

'Laugh at *you*, Miss Helen!' he quickly answered, in a tone and with a look that would have reassured me had the occasion been much more serious than it was; 'not very likely; and Lady Maitland,' he added, after a pause, 'I can assure you, was admiring the "Lay" in all good faith.'

Dr. Blackburn and I had a good deal of interesting talk on the speeches of the evening and things in general, during the intervals of exhibition in the next hour (Sir John kindly pointing out and describing all the striking points in the Continental views, while papa explained those of Egypt and the Holy Land, to the intense enjoyment of the village audience especially), and I could see on looking round that others also were employing the time very much to their own gratification.

The church clock had struck eleven (a later hour than any-

body had contemplated), when we all stood up to sing the last three verses of the 122nd Psalm; and then the blessing was pronounced; after which, and a hearty vote of thanks to the platform, led by Sir John, the meeting dispersed, as happy and well-conducted and intelligent an assembly as could be seen throughout the length and breadth of the land.

Lady Maitland's carriage had been a long time in waiting, and she was now anxious to get home. Papa escorted her to the carriage, and Dr. Blackburn gave his arm to a lady who had accompanied her, Sir John following and talking all the way to some old farmers, who also were coming out to their gigs as vigorously and brightly as if it had been seven o'clock instead of eleven.

Then the Miss Craufurds and their brother got into their phaeton, which had returned for them. Mr. Farquharson was invited to accompany them, but preferred walking, and went away without taking leave of any one. (He had never come to speak to me since I came home, though I had been so long away; but of course I could make great allowance for him, considering all things, and was not going to break my heart on that account.) Then some of the other ladies who had been assisting, and whom circumstances had left 'unprotected,' had to be escorted home; and Tom and Ned Craufurd, with one or two of their young friends, were told off for this duty. Meantime, also, some of the older parishioners who had just quitted the room, with their families, now returned for a parting word with Uncle Maitland. He had been their much-loved pastor before papa, and, as he was going home next day, there would be no other opportunity of getting a shake of his hand. Altogether our getting away from the scene of festivity was a protracted business.

In the confusion of all these successive leave-takings, I soon discovered that we had lost sight of Harriet, or, rather, that she had not chosen to wait so long; and perceiving that Mr. Scott also had disappeared, coupled with the circumstance of Mr. Farquharson's abrupt departure, I drew my own conclusions thereupon, though, of course, it was not my part to say anything.

'Captain and Miss Smythe went away some time ago ; Harriet must have gone with them, and Nurse would be with her too,' Marianne said in all innocence, when papa remarked her absence, as we were mustering for departure ; and this quite satisfied papa.

We were rather a large party walking over to the Manse, for Mary and Lizzie were also to stay there all night (aunt and the boys having gone home) to see Uncle Maitland and the girls. Dr. Blackburn walked with us to the door, though, as it was so late, he would not go in. Harry even, dreadfully late for this one night, was also with us, bounding hither and thither, and in the highest possible spirits.

Harriet was in the dining-room when we went in, sitting with her bonnet on, as if she had just come in, taking off her shawl and gloves, and giving mama an account of the evening ; and Betsy, just come in also, was hurriedly preparing the table for a late tea, for which, by this time, we were all most heartily disposed.

'Oh, Harriet,' said Marianne, 'we could not think where you had vanished to ! Did you come with Captain and Miss Smythe, or with Nurse ?'

'I believe we all came away about the same time,' said Harriet shortly, rising to go up-stairs with her things. 'Is any one coming to take off her bonnet ?'

'We have had a delicious evening, mama,' I said, kissing her ; 'everybody was there,—Sir John and Lady Maitland, and the Craufurds,—even Sir James Elphinstone, and he looked as pleased as any one. I wish you had been there too.'

'When did Mr. Scott go away ?' asked papa, who was walking up and down the room. 'Sir John introduced him to me when we came into the hall to-night, but I expected to have seen him again afterwards. He didn't go with the Maitlands.'

'Did you see him, Harriet ?' said Lizzie, suddenly turning to her, as she was leaving the room.

'Yes,' said Harriet, in a tone that precluded further questioning ; 'he went away the same time as we did : ' and she quitted the room.

'If he came with her,' I thought to myself, 'I wonder we did not meet him coming back. But, to be sure, they must have gone away a good while before us.'

The fact that Mr. Scott *had* come home with her was settled beyond doubt, when I went to take off my bonnet, some minutes afterwards, when Harriet had come down-stairs again. Nurse, who had evidently been watching the opportunity, joined me immediately in my room, with a face full of importance.

'Weel, Miss Heelen,' she began triumphantly, without further ceremony, 'ye'll surely no' say that I tak' up notions noo? Wha do ye think cam' to the door wi' Miss Harrit the nicht?'

'Anybody but you?' I said coolly, though Nurse seemed to be in a heat.

'Me!' echoed Nurse disdainfully; 'atweel Miss Harrit didna get a glisk o' me till she was comin' in hersel' It was jist the young Laird, nae less. Miss Harrit was the queen o' the room,—nae doot about that; an' she bid to get the king.'

'I thought you said a week or two since that the Doctor was "king of the Hielandmen,"—you see, you change about like a weathercock, Nurse,' I said, in a tone that made Nurse look at me with surprise (for, to give myself my due, I was not naturally of a 'cranky' temper, by any means).

'Na, it's no' *me* that chinges,' said she, as if she thought the reproach might be bestowed with advantage elsewhere. 'I wadna gie the Doctor for twenty lairds; but, ye ken, it's no' to be denied that the Laird's the brawest; an', eh me! but he *is* ta'en up about her! Ye see, the Doctor disna speak, sae he has hisselt to blame if he losses her. He's jist fair ower heid an' ears in love—the Laird, I'm meanin'.'

'You said that long ago, Nurse,' said I, laughing, as it was just as well to do, though I would rather not have received the 'confidence' at that particular time, when I was in momentary expectation of Harriet coming into the room. Nurse, however, could not have kept the secret to herself a moment longer to save her life.

'Ay, but I ne'er sawt like what I did the nicht,' she went



on, scarcely stopping to take breath; 'wait a wee or I tell ye. Ye see, I was in the wee room at the time, pittin' in the cups an' things into the basket, an' I couldna help hearin' them,' she added apologetically. 'It was jist after the blessin'; and Miss Harrit an' him were standin' thegither at the door like, lookin' at the folk gaun oot o' the place, an' says the Laird in a whisper (I'm sure I dinna see what way he needed to whisper the like o' that), "Will you go now," says he, "before all these people begin to move? can I get your shawl?" Miss Harrit looked no' jist very sure, but she said something after a wee; an' wi' that he cam' an' took her shawl aff the form, and put it aboot her as neat as *ye* could hae dune, Miss Heelen; an' awa' they gaed oot at the door, withoot a word to onybody; sae I took up my basket an' cam' aff tae, for fear ony questions micht be askit at me; but I thocht to mysel', My certy, but ye're no' blate if ye ca' the Minister, an' Miss Marianne, an' them a', "thae people," atweel!'

'He wouldn't mean them,' I said; 'most likely he referred to his own party, Sir John, and the ladies who were with them.'

'Ay, maybe,' said Nurse, somewhat mollified by this view of the matter; 'he wadna be wantin' to hae to gang hame wi' them; but ye haena heard a' my story yet, Miss Heelen.'

'Nurse,' said I reprovingly; 'it's not like you to tell tales.'

'Deed no'! an' I wadna say't to naebody else; but I ken ye'll ne'er tell't ower again,' said Nurse, with the most imperturbable good humour, altogether ignoring the hint. 'Weel, as I was sayin', I wasna wantin' to pit mysel' in their road, sae I gaed roond by the lang brae and doon by Mary Sheerwood's, an' bade twa three minutes crackin' wi' Mary at her door, to let them be safe by. Then I cam' my ways hame, an' I was jist pittin' in the key into the door (I had ta'en't wi' me, no' to haud the mistress comin' to the back), an' thinkin' what a bonnie nicht it was, when whae shuld come walkin' up through the gate but jist the Laird and Miss

Harrit—awfu' slow they bid to hae walkit, to be only that length! I wondered they werena feared for the rest o' ye comin' up ahint; but, to be sure, they had a guid start. They stoppit ower at the rowan-tree when they saw me; an', says Miss Harrit, "There's Nurse," says she; "don't mind coming any farther, Mr. Scott; the door will be opened immediately." "Well, if *you* don't wish it," says he, but far lower than she spoke,—'deed I could hardly hear him ava,—an' then he took her hand (ye ken, I saw him fine in the moonlight!) an' lifted it to his mouth, and kissed it, an' then he gaed awa', and Miss Harrit cam' forrit. I'm no' jist sure if she was very weel pleased at me being stannin' there; but, ye ken, I couldna help it, an' she kent, ony way, that her auld Nurse wad tell nae tales on her.'

I was not by any means so sure that Harriet had this consolation. Nurse's liberal mode of keeping a secret, either letting it ooze out in little bits, or else relieving herself by telling it in confidence to some one individual, was very well known in the household; and Harriet had no reason to flatter herself that hers would prove an exception. But, of course, I did not hurt poor Nurse's feelings by hinting this; besides, if nobody were told of it but 'me,' there was no great harm done, as I could at least keep quiet on the subject.

After she had quitted the room, I sat for some minutes without taking off my bonnet, 'pondering' what she had told me, which, though in some degree prepared for something of the sort, came upon me with all the effect of a surprise. Mr. Scott!—after having heard him talked of for years with that sublime 'distance' which would have made even lesser things seem grand and magnificent—to have him suddenly brought so near me, and in such a connection! Well, it *was* rather astonishing. And yet not nearly so much so as it would have seemed to me six weeks ago—so much had happened in that short time, so many other thoughts and feelings had now a place in my mind as to modify even that. I seemed to have begun to live almost from the hour that I left school, and I had learned many things not once dreamt of in my philosophy then.

Well, Harriet was a lucky girl, everybody would say. But what did Nurse say about the Doctor? She had that notion yet, had she? Ah! but I thought she was wrong now. True, Mr. Scott and he were anything but cordial yet, even after the effort Dr. Blackburn had made; but the feeling—if there was any between them—must be upon Mr. Scott's side only. I was not, of course, sure; I would not say much about it, even to myself yet,—a little jealousy of Harriet still lurked in my secret heart—I *could* not help it,—but *I thought she was wrong*.

The gong sounding for prayers interrupted my meditations, and I had to throw off my wraps in a hurry and fly downstairs, to find them all assembled, waiting for me.

We had a most talkative and merry tea afterwards, almost midnight though it was! Papa and Uncle Maitland were so pleased with the way everything had gone on throughout the entire evening, that their good spirits infected us all, and mama had enough to do listening to the details that were related to her on all sides. 'I thought Sir James spoke uncommonly well to-night,' remarked Uncle Maitland, after all the various comments and criticisms on the events of the evening (and especially Sir John's speech, which was universally admired) had been well-nigh exhausted, 'and the people certainly listened to him with the greatest attention. I think he seemed pleased with the whole affair.'

'Everybody seemed pleased,' papa said, looking very much so himself. 'I don't know as to Mr. Scott, to be sure,' he added, on recollection; 'I am afraid he must have heard a great deal that was disagreeable to him, but that could not be helped, of course. I think it was rather ill-advised of Sir John to bring him on such an occasion.'

I thought, in my own mind, that Sir John might possibly have had as little to do with 'bringing' Mr. Scott to the meeting as I had, but of course I did not say so; and the stream of talk ran on.

'I was surprised to see Sir John Maitland and the ladies stay so late,' Mary remarked from the opposite side of the

table. 'I thought they would have gone away when Sir James Elphinstone and the Craufurds went.'

'You don't know Sir John,' said mama; 'he wouldn't leave an entertainment of that sort till the very end, in case it looked as if he slighted it. Besides, he really enjoys it himself,—to make the working classes happy has always been a hobby, or rather, I should say, a pleasure of his; and Lady Maitland takes just as great an interest in these things as he does. If there were more in the upper classes like them, there would not be so much radicalism in the country.'

'No,' said papa reflectively; 'I believe there is hardly another parish of the same extent in Scotland so free of radicalism. And it is entirely owing to the admirable "masters" we have amongst us here,—landlords, farmers, and mill-owners—they are all unexceptionable—all careful to act upon the Scripture injunction to give to their subordinates "that which is just and right," remembering that they also, have a Master to give account to. But I speak of what has been in the past,' papa added abruptly. 'No one can tell, of course, how this young Laird that has come among us is to turn out. He looks pleasant enough, I must say, and his manner is very winning.'

'Oh, he is delightful!' cried Marianne, in her usual warm, impulsive manner. 'He looks so kind and good, too! Papa, *he* will never do anything to disturb the parish; and all the disagreeable things Mr. Morton has been doing of late have been without his knowledge, I am quite sure of that.'

'We will hope so, my dear,' papa said, rather dubiously.

'What do you say, Harriet?' asked Lizzie, in an undertone, not meant to reach the head of the table.

'On what subject?' inquired Harriet, with freezing dignity; but Lizzie, conscious that she was not exactly on safe ground, did not repeat the question.

'Lady Maitland is a lovely creature!' remarked Louisa, as papa and Uncle Maitland fell into a long and seemingly engrossing conversation on the present aspect of affairs in the parish, in which mama joined, leaving the rest of the table to

their own talk. 'Such a sweet, bright, winning expression she has! No wonder Sir John looks so happy with such a darling wife.'

'She sings so sweetly, too!' chimed in Marian; 'and Sir John sings quite as well, for a gentleman. But Mr. Farquharson!—oh, Mr. Farquharson!—no one could sing after him! It is not too much to say I *never* heard a voice like his.'

'And he is so clever!' exclaimed Lizzie, as enthusiastically as Marian; 'I never met any one that had such a power of repartee. He sat beside Louisa and me nearly all the evening, and he did entertain us! I think he had the most of the speaking to do himself, though, Louy?—it would require a clever person to keep up a conversation long with *him*!'

'I think you managed pretty well,' said Louisa, smiling.

I glanced at Louisa as she spoke, and wondered in my own mind if so attractive and discriminating a gentleman as I knew Mr. Farquharson to be, had not discovered that she, Louisa Maitland, sitting beside him, was very attractive too—a good replica, in fact (if scarcely so brilliant and striking, yet softer and sweeter, I thought), of that other face of which his heart was full. I fancied, from something in her expression when he was named, that the old childish friendship between them might easily develop into something deeper, on her part at least. Lizzie, also, was a very fascinating young lady in her own way—not by any means a beauty, like some of her cousins, but very clever and *piquante*, and a belle in Edinburgh circles; so that, altogether, Mr. Farquharson had been very advantageously placed between two such companions.

'It was so kind of *all* our friends to countenance us as they did,' I could not help saying,—'even old Captain Smythe and Major Farquharson; and they seemed to take as great an interest in all that was going on as any there. And their songs were very nice and amusing, the dear old gentlemen!'

'And Mr. Scott,' said Lizzie—'what could possibly have brought him there? It must have been the tea and cake,' she added, with one of her mischievous glances at Harriet.

‘I should have been ashamed of myself, if I were he, to come for that.’

‘I saw him assisting you most assiduously at tea, Ellie, and talking at no end of a rate,’ said Marianne, coming in to cover the laugh that followed this, which Harriet had evidently no mind to join.

‘I don’t know about the talking,’ I said, smiling; ‘I rather think he shone in deeds more than words to-night. I know *I* did;’ and I related the episode of the teapot.

‘Then, Harriet, you shall send your card to-morrow to inquire for him; he sent to ask for you,’ was the next ebullition of Lizzie’s wit, when the various exclamations of wonder at my stupidity, and concern for the accident, had been exhausted.

‘Thank you, Lizzie; since you think it necessary, perhaps you would take the message yourself,’ was all Harriet deigned to reply, as she pointed to the hour in the timepiece, which was on the stroke of one.

‘Are you going to Sir John’s next Friday night, Ellie?’ asked Mary, some minutes afterwards, as we were about to separate for the night.

‘Oh, Ellie was specially invited,’ said Marianne. ‘It is Sir John’s birthday, and he says she must come out at his party; it is her birthday (Tom’s and Ellie’s) too, you know, though we don’t speak of that, as Sir John would be toasting her if he remembered it, and she wouldn’t like that. Ellie thinks she would rather be in the garden than in a hot ball-room on a summer night; but I tell her to wait till she is in the ball-room, and she won’t miss the flowers for one night.’

*She* would not, probably; with her the difficulty usually was to choose amongst the host of partners who besieged her; but there was a great likelihood of my turning out a ‘wall-flower’ myself, and reduced to pining after the more appreciative society of my kind. However, we would see.



## CHAPTER XI.

### PICNICS.

*‘Où allons-nous, madame?  
Nous allons à la campagne.’*

**T**HE week succeeding the *soirée* was given up to the entertainment of our Glasgow cousins. They were to stay with us till the following Friday, and numerous excursions were planned to occupy the summer days, and make them enjoyable for them—Colston being known and beloved ground to them, as well as to us.

On Saturday (the day after the meeting), Marianne and I, and our two cousins, went into Edinburgh, and spent a happy day, visiting some old friends,—as also the Castle, the Calton Hill, the old Palace, and other places of ever new interest, which they had not seen for years,—thereby missing a visit from Sir John and Mr. Scott, who called to inquire for us after our exertions the previous night, and which mama and Harriet, who were at home, had all the benefit of; also one from Major and Mr. Farquharson, who called later. Papa, being out on some parish business, also missed both visits; but, in Nurse's opinion, they could not have called at a better time; for, as she reported to me when we came home, pretty late at night (Tom being along with us), ‘They didna see each ither, so they were baith weel pleased’ (the ‘both,’ I took for granted, referring to the younger gentlemen). Mr. Scott seemed to have made a most favourable impression on mama,—she had scarcely spoken to him the former time he

called ; so that altogether the day had been a satisfactory one, both at home and abroad.

The next day was Sabbath, lovely and sweet as midsummer could make it, and papa exchanged services with Mr. Monteith, according to previous arrangement. Mr. Monteith arrived in country fashion before we had finished breakfast, that he might have a quiet hour in the study before the church hour ; and about ten o'clock (after the boy and horse had had a good rest) our cousins and Marianne drove away with papa in the gig that had brought him, to spend the day quietly at Strathie Church and Manse ; and we had a very peaceful and pleasant day, with Mr. Monteith, at home.

Monday was devoted, according to a pre-arranged plan, to a picnic to the 'Poet's Bower,'—we seven girls, Tom, and his fellow-student Ned Craufurd (who was our daily visitor), and Dr. Blackburn. The Doctor, who had suggested the expedition, had given himself the unusual indulgence of a holiday ; and we set out about twelve o'clock, the gentlemen carrying baskets containing a plentiful supply of provisions. We were bound in the first place for 'the hills,' which were more than three miles distant from the Manse, one of the highest of which we climbed, and were rewarded by the magnificent view of more than half-a-dozen counties, which we had come see. Then we went in a body to call at a lone manse among the hills, the owner of which (an old bachelor friend of papa's and Dr. Hunter's, and an antiquary and recluse) was so delighted to see any one belonging to his old friends, that he and his good old housekeeper would have had every article of food in the house set before us, had we not assured them that the 'Poet' would be mortally offended if we did not dine in his 'Bower,' as we had engaged to do. We gratified their kind hospitality, however, by eating, and thoroughly enjoying, some delicious strawberries and cream ; and then, after examining the many curiosities in his very interesting museum, and admiring the wild and picturesque views from all the windows, we retraced our steps to the 'Poet's Bower.' It was a cloudless July day, the birds singing



joyously in the thick branching trees overhead, and the ripple of the little stream at our feet, being the only sounds that fell on the summer stillness; and never did ham and chicken and lemonade taste more delicious than in the repast which Dr. Blackburn and the boys soon set forth in the sylvan retreat.

After dinner we dispersed in groups through the neighbouring woods, in search of wild flowers, to add to a collection I was making; and of fir-tops, for Marianne's frames and basket-work (all for the bazaar); and the Doctor proved a most efficient assistant in discovering and securing both. When we had gathered all we could find, we returned to the Bower, having previously made interest with a nice old woman, who lived in a cottage a little way off, to 'mask' our tea for us; and our attendant cavaliers brought it to our airy drawing-room, in gay-coloured cups (her wedding china of forty years before), which they had promised to take the greatest care of. After tea, we had music, each one contributing a song, even Tom. Dr. Blackburn sang 'The Meeting of the Waters' (in a voice which critics might have pronounced not equal to Mr. Farquharson's, but which *I* infinitely preferred), which the stillness of the place, shut in on all sides by the surrounding wood, and the silvery tinkle with which the water trickled over the pebbles in its course, made strangely suggestive.

It was almost nine o'clock when we returned to the Manse, where mama and papa were sitting alone in the parlour waiting for us, and wondering why we were so late; and Nurse had a substantial tea ready set for us, to which we were quite prepared to do ample justice; and we all, including the Doctor, agreed that we had never spent a happier day.

'Where shall we go to-day?' asked Marianne next morning, as we sat at breakfast in the bright parlour, with the sun streaming in upon the table, and the birds serenading us as usual.

We had formed no particular plans for the day; some of us had talked of walking to Colmuir End, to see the Doddses; but, as we were to meet them at Major Farquharson's in the

evening, we agreed to defer our visit to the Manse till the following day. And yet it was a pity to waste the beautiful day at home.

‘What do you say to a walk to Habbie’s Howe, Louy?’ said I. ‘You said the other day you had not seen it since you were a child, and I have not seen it for years; suppose we go there to-day, if it is not too far for you—but it is fully three miles each way; and we have to be at Major Farquharson’s at seven o’clock, remember.’

‘Oh, I am sure we could easily manage it,’ said Marianne; ‘and we had better go to-day, as it may rain to-morrow. But it is a pity we did not ask Mary and Lizzie to come early, and we could all have gone together.’

‘They were at Habbie’s Howe the week before they left home (Mrs. Mackintosh’s picnic, you remember—we couldn’t go to it); they wouldn’t care to go again so soon,’ said Harriet. ‘Besides, we have not gentlemen for so many girls. No, let us go by ourselves,—that is, if Louy and Marian think it will not be too much for them; and we will take our lunch with us, and have it on the grass,—a regular Spurgeon picnic,—and we must be home in time to have a good long rest before the evening.’

‘Yes,’ said Marianne, as Louisa and Marian gave a ready assent; ‘there is always croquet, or something of the sort, at Major Farquharson’s, and it won’t do to be fatigued—it is such a long walk there too.’

And so it was settled, and Betsy sent over to the village, as speedily as possible, to purvey for our expedition, and get good Miss Smythe to take Marianne’s place in reading at the hospital, as she had taken mine the day before. As soon as she came back, we began busily to prepare the sandwiches, as well as to put up a sufficient supply of biscuits and milk, for the refreshment of five people so hungry as we were likely to be when we reached our destination. Before we had quite finished our preparations, Captain Craufurd and his sister came in, by chance, along with their brother, and, on learning our intended expedition, they asked to be allowed to accom-

pany us. He was one of Marianne's special admirers, for, though the fact of her engagement was pretty well known among our intimate friends, still I do not think the Captain had been able quite to convince himself as yet that his hopes were in vain. Tom and Ned were next coaxed to join the party; and of course it was necessary to make further provision for so large an addition,—though they all promised to be as moderate in their requirements as possible. So, preparing as many more sandwiches as we had materials for, and begging an indefinite number of biscuits from mama, and a small flask of sherry for the Captain's benefit, we started, not much later than the previous day after all.

It was, as I said, a beautiful July day; not a cloud in the smiling sky; the sun so bright, and the air so warm and sweet, that it was impossible to do otherwise than enjoy it. We went by the glebe pathway, leading into the Kinleith road, which cut off a good round of our walk; and, as we had all to pass in single file between the corn and the churchyard wall, we had a good deal of amusement before we reached the stile which we had to pass over into the road. Opposite this were the great iron gates leading into the Dalmany grounds, through which some of our party looked rather enviously at the wide-spreading oaks and beeches, wishing we could have their grateful shade on our hot and dusty walk. We had not got far from the gates, when I saw, in the distance, a gentleman riding down the road towards us, his groom behind, and his dogs bounding before him. We all recognised Mr. Scott at once.

He dismounted when he saw us, giving the reins to his groom, and came forward, lifting his hat, and with an expression of radiant pleasure in his very winning face, most flattering to the whole party. He had already, it appeared, made acquaintance with the Craufurds, and only our cousins required to be introduced to him. On learning our intended expedition, he begged leave to join the party.

'But we are going to search for ferns, Mr. Scott,' urged Harriet, in remonstrance, resolved apparently not to seem too

anxious for his company ; 'and we may perhaps stay two or three hours looking for them.'

'The longer the better, if you allow me to accompany you,' he rejoined eagerly ; 'I have had some experience in fern-hunting, and may be able to assist you. I hope you will not deny me the pleasure ?'

He addressed us all, but looked somewhat anxiously at Harriet, who, of course, answered with a smile, 'We shall be delighted to have you, Mr. Scott, if you care to come.' And what could the rest of us say, but 'Of course we shall' ?

The groom then rode away with the horses and dogs, and we walked on. A little further along we met Anne Millar returning from Kinleith, carrying her large market-basket containing Miss Smythe's semi-weekly supply of butter and eggs (which the Captain always required to be brought from Mr. Russell's farm, and nowhere else), and I stopped for a minute or two to speak to the good old woman, and ask for her husband, who had been ailing. When I rejoined the party, I found they had all come to a standstill once more, and were debating some further point among themselves, as I heard Mr. Scott say, when I came up to them,—

'I think we should try Dalmany to-day. I can assure you the ferns there are finer than any about Habbie's Howe, and we can take that another day.'

He addressed the whole party, but, as usual, looked at Harriet, who answered in her usual deliberate manner,—

'Well, if my cousins can be persuaded to give up their sight of Habbie's Howe,—but that was what we came out for.'

'But we will not give it up,' said Mr. Scott eagerly. 'If the day is fine, and you have no other engagement, we will take Habbie's Howe to-morrow.'

And so it was arranged, the rest of us readily assenting, as we were evidently expected to do,—and we speedily retraced the short distance we had come, and soon found ourselves under the coveted and most delightful shade of the Dalmany oaks. The park and pleasure-grounds, glowing with summer

beauty, lay smiling round us through the leafy screen, the song of hundreds of birds thrilled through the sweet summer air, butterflies spread their bright wings and coquetted about us on all sides, while the graceful deer peeped at us through the trees, and then bounded away, tossing their branching horns ; and the ripple of water in the distance added music to the whole. It was a morning for youth, happiness, and love ; and the whole fairy-like scene was in keeping, and the steps of the merry party almost dancing, as we passed along the broad sunny road, under the gently waving branches.

Mr. Scott's spirits seemed to rise from the moment that he got us all within his own gates. He was perfectly 'fey,' as the Highlanders say, and jested and laughed as merrily as any one, though still in the very quietest manner ; while at the same time he displayed such a thorough knowledge of every subject touched upon, and so much good sense and right feeling withal, that we were all astonished and charmed, as we certainly had not expected him to come out in that way. Captain Craufurd, too, having secured his favourite position by Marianne's side, was quite as exhilarated for the time, and looked the very spirit of happiness and fun. As for the rest of us, we also gave ourselves up to the pleasure of the hour, and enjoyed ourselves to the full. Ah, well, such days come seldom enough to any of us, and pass all too quickly ! One short year after, how vividly did the remembrance of that bright morning return to my heart !

'Why should one man have all this for himself?' was a thought that darted across my mind once, as I looked around on the fair domain, and thought how many people must be employed in-doors and out, in ministering to the comfort, or rather, the luxury, of one, while so many others, perhaps better people, had scarcely enough to live on. But then again I remembered, as I recalled one speech of the previous week, that so it must be in a world full of human beings, else there could be no established order at all,—that some had always been, and always must be 'lords and high estates,' while others are but 'hewers of wood and drawers of water ;' and

the same in regard to other 'gifts,' some being rich, others beautiful, clever, and so on; while others would almost seem to have nothing at all, though they also had their own compensations from the Sovereign Disposer,—there was no doubt of that. Also, that those differences had been from the beginning, and must therefore, like all else, have been, for wise reasons, 'ordained of God.' And the vague misgiving in my mind was at once soothed and dispelled in the one thought which alone has power to reconcile us to all the strange inequalities of this life,—'Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in Thy sight.'

We soon reached the scene of our former exploits five weeks before (and what an age that seemed already to look back upon!), with its great rocky cliffs towering above us, crowned with foliage, and, far down below, the river noisily flowing over its bed of stones. The boys went away down the bank, as previously arranged, to enjoy an hour's fishing; while we girls and our attending cavaliers dispersed ourselves over the soft and velvet turf in pursuit of wild-flowers and ferns. We were certainly more successful this time in our quest, and found a great many of the rarer kinds of both, the gentlemen spying them in all sorts of unlikely places, and digging them up for us—proving themselves invaluable assistants, as they had promised to be.

Then Captain Craufurd and Marianne and the other girls went away up the bank to look at the ferns that had formerly tempted Harriet, the Captain engaging to prevent any repetition of the catastrophe of that day; while Harriet and Mr. Scott and I strolled slowly along by the side of the river, adding to our collection of wood-flowers as we walked, and becoming rapidly better acquainted and more and more pleased with each other. Returning afterwards to the bank by a somewhat circuitous route, we passed the ravine, close by the scene of Harriet's memorable fall. Mr. Scott paused to look at the place, so did Harriet; while I, less sentimental, took the opportunity to arrange my flowers, laying them all down on the grass for this purpose.

'It was here I saw you first,' I heard him say to her, in a tone so low that it scarcely reached me.

'I gave you—and everybody—a great deal of trouble that day,' Harriet replied; by way of saying something, I suppose.

'It was the happiest day of my life.'

'I never heard such a heartless speech!' I heard Harriet say, as she turned away in pretended indignation.

'You know how I meant it,' were the next words that fell on my ears; then, after a pause, 'If you only knew how often'—

The rest of the sentence was inaudible to me, as he had quite turned his back upon me in his earnestness. I fancied I could guess it, however, when I caught a glimpse of Harriet's face, as she moved rather suddenly towards me. 'Ellie,' she exclaimed, as if I had caused the delay, 'how long are you going to stay arranging your flowers? you know it is almost three o'clock; I am sure the others will be waiting for us.'

I had the conversation pretty much to myself as we climbed up the bank, neither of my companions seeming inclined to talk, and I thought there was a shade of embarrassment in the manner of both, which made the return stroll very different from the liveliness and mirth of the preceding one. It wore off, however, when we reached the top, where we found the whole joyous party (the boys having rejoined them a few minutes before) encamped on the soft greensward by the side of the old castle, glad now to rest their weariness, and very ready also for another kind of refreshment, which Marianne was already taking out of the baskets. Harriet and I sat down on the grass, close beside the grey, weather-beaten walls, glad of the cool shade, and glad also of the rest, after our long ramble. Mr. Scott threw himself down beside us, fanning himself vigorously with his handkerchief, and Captain Craufurd came forward and triumphantly exhibited the trophies of their expedition,—they having, like the king of France of famous memory, successfully mounted to the top of the cliff and come safely down again; while I retorted by exhibiting ours, which were quite as fine, although we had not left *terra firma*; and

Mr. Scott turned the laugh against the Captain for having led a detachment of the company into such dangers for so insignificant results.

Never was there a merrier picnic! Marianne did the honours, and did them to perfection, and the whole party seemed to vie with each other as to who should contribute most to the general entertainment. And, though there was one presence wanting here that had made the 'Poet's Bower' like Eden to me, yet I am bound to acknowledge that this also was a pleasant day. Afterwards we had a round of proverbs, conundrums, and verses of poetry, in all of which Mr. Scott bore his part with spirit,—contrasting rather strongly in that respect with Captain Craufurd, who made no pretensions to be intellectual, and never shone in exercises of this sort. Then some one proposed music, and Marianne sang 'The Rowan Tree' with great sweetness and pathos; and Miss Craufurd gave some of the old Scotch ballads with fine effect, in a scene where everything spoke so strongly of the 'olden time.' None of the rest of us girls had much voice, except Harriet, perhaps; but she declined to sing on the present occasion. Then Captain Craufurd was called upon, and he gave perhaps the most ridiculously *mal-à-propos* song he could have chosen for the present company,—'The Laird o' Cockpen,' which he sang with all the spirit and graces possible, totally unconscious of the smothered amusement of most of his auditors, and the secret irritation of one. Harriet, I could see, was on thorns throughout the performance. After one indignant glance flashed at the unconscious Captain,—who evidently thought we were all enjoying his song,—she sat with her eyes on the ground, and her face on fire, till it was finished; while the rest of us listened with different shades of embarrassment, more or less—though (Lizzie not being present) I think, on the whole, we all behaved very well. As for Mr. Scott, he sat as impassive as if he had been turned into stone, and I observed that he joined in the applause at the conclusion in the faintest possible manner. After that, the Captain, taking the prolonged applause of the boys for an *encore*,—as perhaps it was,—next



treated us to 'Huntingtower,' which was a small improvement on the last; and then he called upon Mr. Scott to take his turn in charming the company. Mr. Scott, however, professed an utter inability to sing, and asked Ned Craufurd to act as his substitute, who did so with a very nice little comic song, which ended our musical entertainment.

Mr. Scott now proposed that, if the party had sufficiently rested, we should all adjourn to the fruit gardens, and have our dessert from the strawberry-beds—an invitation which most of us would willingly have accepted; but it appeared that Harriet, to whom it was specially directed, had a decided objection to doing so. 'She was tired and hot,' she said, and could not possibly walk farther to-day, especially as it was quite time we were proceeding homewards;' adding, as she turned to Mr. Scott, who stood waiting her decision as if the happiness of his life depended on it, 'We go to Major Farquharson's this evening.'

This piece of information did not seem to gratify Mr. Scott, as his face clouded, and he looked so disappointed altogether, that I would have made an effort to change Harriet's determination, had I not known from experience that it would be useless, as she always knew her own mind, and, unlike me, never acted from mere impulse. The rest of us were somewhat disappointed also, as we would have enjoyed the expedition,—which, as Marianne remarked afterwards, might have perhaps led to a tour of the house and pictures,—but, of course, it could not be helped; for, though Mr. Scott courteously repeated his invitation to us, we had no alternative, in the circumstances, but to decline. Louisa and Marian, however, expressed a great wish to see the chapel before they left, as some one appeared to be in it at this moment; and Captain Craufurd and Tom volunteered to escort them and then overtake us, if we walked very slowly down the avenue. Marianne and Miss Craufurd, however, chose to go also, and Ned and I were following them, without thinking anything about it, when Harriet authoritatively called me back. 'I am sure, Ellie,' she said, in a remonstrating tone, 'you were all over the chapel

three weeks ago ; you can't wish to go back again. And Ned has been there a dozen times. We must go home now, or we won't be able to get through a single game of croquet to-night.'

It was fully five o'clock, and the trees and grass, and all around, were gleaming in the golden sunshine, when we left our shady pleasant seat, protected by the grey old walls which frowned down upon us, as they had frowned upon Queen Mary three hundred years before, when she and her Court honoured the grim old Earl of Colston with a visit, as she not unfrequently did in the hunting-season. 'Poor Queen Mary !' Harriet said, as we paused to look round on the picturesque and beautiful scene that had such romantic associations connected with it,—'she had not a very happy life. And yet I believe she was as sincere in her faith, in her different way, as we are.'

'Do *you* say so ?' said Mr. Scott, with a bright look of surprise and pleasure ; 'do you really think so ?'

'Certainly,' repeated Harriet ; 'we cannot doubt that. She suffered a great deal in defence of it, and so did some of her descendants.'

'Oh yes, they *must* have been sincere,' I could not help adding, speaking warmly as I felt ; for I have always thought that the Stuarts, mistaken though they were, and quite right though it was that they should be expelled from the throne, were yet in a sense martyrs on account of their religion. 'They would not have given up everything—crown and kingdom, and even life, as some of them did—if they had not believed that theirs was the only true faith.'

'Well, I should not have expected to hear such sentiments from you,' rejoined Mr. Scott, still looking somewhat surprised, and at the same time very much pleased.

'Did you expect us to be such bigots ?' asked Harriet, smiling.

'We think they were mistaken,' I subjoined, before Mr. Scott could reply ; 'and their system would have been destructive to the country. But they acted according to their light in a very dark age, and we cannot blame them for that. Of course it is very different now ; I could not imagine any

one going back to the darkness of Popery, in the light of the present day.'

'Oh, Ellie, Dr. Newman!—have you forgotten him?—a great and good man, surely?' said Harriet, in a reproving tone. 'And there have been others besides him.'

'Yes, there is Dr. Newman certainly,' I rejoined; 'but—I should suppose, at least, that *his* great intellect had been bewildered by all sorts of speculations before he took refuge in the dead rest of Popery. Of course that is only *my* idea, but I think it may be inferred from his own hymns.'

We walked on in silence for some minutes after that; Harriet, I could see, thought me rather plain-speaking, and Mr. Scott, for other reasons probably, not caring to make any reply. But that he was not displeased was evident; for, having lingered behind for a few minutes with Ned, to gather some sweet wild-flowers blooming under the sheltering oaks, when we rejoined them again, he was relating to her some details of the sufferings of his own family, in the cause of the Stuarts and of their Church, for many generations—sufferings and self-sacrifices certainly as heroic as any which the page even of Scottish history could unfold. Gratified by the interest we both evinced in the narration, he eagerly expressed his hope of being privileged on an early day to show us the portraits of those ancestors—and especially of those ladies of his race who had most conspicuously shone in those deeds.

We had nearly reached the lodge-gates on our way home, and the rest of the party had just overtaken us, when we saw Mr. Morton coming up the avenue towards us. I expected he would be annoyed to see Mr. Scott in our company, and that he would show it when he came up to us, by an accession of sourness in his usually vinegar aspect, but it seemed I was mistaken. Mr. Morton beamed most benignantly on us all, his eyes literally raining sunshine as he raised his hat to us and hurried past; and I reproached myself for my curtness to him at our former interview, when he really seemed to be so well disposed.

'How that man has improved of late!' Captain Craufurd

remarked to me, when he had passed, Mr. Scott and the others being a little way in advance. 'I really believe it was some defect in his brain, and not anything worse, that made him act as he did before. He seems to be one of those who will do well under a master, but cannot be trusted alone.'

The Craufurds parted from us at the bridge, to hurry over to the village, to secure the inn gig (the only public conveyance the place boasted) to take them home, it being now so late—we impressing upon them to send it back in good time to convey us to Major Farquharson's, where they also were to be. Mr. Scott came up with us to the Manse door, and, as he rang the bell for us, he said, in the most matter-of-course manner (having previously settled the point with Harriet, as I had overheard), 'To-morrow, about twelve, I suppose, for Habbie's Howe?'

And what could we answer but Yes? as of course we did.

Our party at Major Farquharson's was a fitting wind-up to the pleasures of that bright day, the old Major himself being the very kindest of hosts, and Mr. Farquharson (who seemed in great spirits) a most attractive one, the weather being all that could be desired for such an occasion. Everybody was there whom I, at least, desired to see; and, as I had a delightful game of croquet, and one quadrille afterwards on the grass, with Dr. Blackburn, to the music of Captain Craufurd's violin, there was nothing wanting to complete my felicity. Harriet and Mr. Farquharson were our *vis-à-vis*, both in the game and in the quadrille; and, as I observed him bending over her, and hanging on her lightest word, I could not help thinking what a wonderful power beauty was,—greater, perhaps, than any other,—in being able thus to subjugate even strong men to its influence, like veriest slaves, for the time. I felt angry with Harriet, I could hardly tell why, when I saw her talking and smiling to Mr. Farquharson now, exactly as she had done to Mr. Scott in the morning; but, to be sure, that was no business of mine. Even Dan, the Major's factotum,—who was in attendance to remove the croquet apparatus at the end

of the game, for the dancing,—was not above this weakness, for he took a long look at Harriet, after his work was completed, as she stood by his young master waiting for the music to begin, and then observed confidentially to me, ‘Ay, she’s a bonnie cratur that.’ Dan had been the Major’s servant nearly all the time he had been in the army, and he was now butler, groom, and gardener, all in one. His wife Margaret was housekeeper, and they two, with a young girl for housework, formed the bachelor establishment.

To me that evening was all enjoyment,—I thought, however, that Louisa scarcely seemed in as good spirits as usual, and wondered if anything had vexed her, though somehow I could not have asked her for the world; and the walk home in the moonlight, when—after escorting the Doddses to their own door—Louisa and I walked with the Doctor, while the others disposed themselves according to pleasure, was perhaps the best part of it all.

The next day, punctually at twelve, as we were all sitting in the large bow-window of the dining-room, busy with the bazaar work (mama and Nurse having made all our other preparations for us), waiting for the gentlemen to appear, Betsy announced ‘Mr. Scott,’ and Mr. Scott walked in. He came in bright and pleasant as before, shaking hands cordially with us all, but I observed his colour heighten when he came to Harriet. He took a chair beside us, and examined the work on the table with the air of a connoisseur, promising to come to the bazaar and buy the large fire-screen which I was sewing. Captain Craufurd, with his brother and sister, now appeared; and then papa was sent for from the study to see the gentlemen.

He and Mr. Scott met very cordially, for, though they had scarcely spoken to each other as yet, still they had many associations in common, papa having been well acquainted with his parents, and having seen himself also in his juvenile days, fifteen years before.

‘We are delighted to have you amongst us again, Mr. Scott,’ papa said warmly, after some mutual reminiscences had been

exchanged ; ‘and you will allow me to add that I hope your coming will be a blessing to the parish.’

‘I hope so, indeed, Dr. Fitz-James,’ Mr. Scott said, in a manner that pleased me very much ; ‘I shall, at least, make it my aim to try to be so.’

We now went up-stairs to put on our hats, and, when we returned to the dining-room, the boys had passed into the garden to show Harry how to shape a boat he was making ; and the two young men were conversing with mama and papa as if they had been acquainted for years. We were all to spend that evening at West Brook (Colonel Craufurd’s), and mama advised us not to be so late in returning from our picnic as we had been the day before, as two parties in one day were rather too much without a good rest between, and Mr. Scott laughingly undertook to bring us all back in plenty of time. We then set out on our walk,—the boys rather grudgingly, it must be confessed, for they were beginning to tire of so many picnics, where they alleged all *their* share of the entertainment was to carry the luncheon-baskets. However, mama privately asked them to go, and they went.

I do not remember anything particular connected with that day’s expedition, as it was in many respects very like the day before, with this difference, that, there being no castle or cliffs to explore, or pleasure-grounds to stroll in, there were not so many opportunities for *tête-à-tête* parties. But the view from the top of the hill was magnificent, and the walk to and from delightful. We had also a great deal of fun as we sat all together at our luncheon in the ‘Howe,’ at the game of ‘Which do you like best ?’ in characters, virtues, names, flowers, books, etc., leading to an amusing discussion of the Waverley Novels, which I had not expected Mr. Scott would have appreciated at all, but which he appeared to do most thoroughly ; and, when Harriet was rather inclining to the author’s view of the Covenanters, that they were ignorant and fanatical, and I stoutly advocated the opposite opinion, that they were enlightened far in advance of their day, it was he who remarked that, of course, different opinions would be held on that subject,

as on all others, but that he was rather inclined to admire them. I was delighted also to find that Mr. Scott's taste accorded with mine in liking *Old Mortality* the best of them all; but his murder of the Scotch dialect in describing the passages that had particularly amused him, entertained us all excessively, and called forth shouts of laughter from Captain Craufurd and the boys, that might have disconcerted any one less good-tempered than he appeared to be.

We were about a mile from the Manse, on our way home, and Harriet and Louisa, with Mr. Scott, were a little in advance of the others, all coming down the Kinkleith road, when there suddenly appeared in the distance a riding party, consisting of several ladies and gentlemen, galloping towards us, amongst whom I soon distinguished Miss Elphinstone, her friend Lady Charlotte, and their brothers, Colonel Elphinstone and Major Hayes.

Mr. Scott flushed to the very roots of his hair, as he raised his hat to the party. Miss Elphinstone's colour rose also, and as suddenly faded to pallor, as she made a slight haughty inclination intended for no one in particular; and the whole cavalcade was past in a moment, though not before she had taken in at a glance every detail of the appearance and bearing of the two girls who were nearest to her cousin; and certainly she would have gone far before she saw two like them.

Mr. Scott made no remark on the occurrence, but resumed the conversation as if there had been no interruption; and we soon came to the bridge, where we parted from the Craufurds, as before, their phaeton being in waiting for them at the inn. But, though Mr. Scott was quite as late for his evening engagement, considering he had to walk home and dine first, he insisted on escorting us to the Manse door, laughingly asserting that he must receive an acknowledgment from mama for having brought us all home in such good time. However, we would not allow him to wait for that.

We found the same party assembled at West Brook as we had met the previous evening, with the addition only of Mr. Scott; but I am afraid this latter circumstance somewhat

spoiled its enjoyment for Mr. Farquharson, and, I think, for Dr. Blackburn also, though not, I thought, from the same cause. Harriet, however, behaved admirably, and dispensed her smiles and her attention most impartially; and the party passed in the usual manner of summer parties in the country, tea and chit-chat—croquet, and a promenade through the grounds (if any)—a dance on the grass—then strawberries, and more small-talk, or perhaps some game to enliven them—and lastly, home in the pleasant moonlight, and along the quiet country roads. To me the hours flew by on silver wings, both while strolling through the beautiful gardens in the sweet summer twilight, and afterwards in the brightly lighted, cheerful rooms, with the company I had learned to admire most in the world. All was like Elysium to me; and I was more than amazed when Miss Smythe hurriedly rose to go, declaring that it was almost twelve o'clock. Not a little to the disappointment, however, of several of the party, Mrs. Craufurd decreed that it was too late for any of the ladies to walk home, so the large roomy phaeton was brought round to the door, and, after conveying the Dodds girls and their brother the short distance to their manse, it returned for us; and we five girls and Miss Smythe were with some difficulty packed into it, and we drove off, leaving the gentlemen to make the best of their way home by themselves. It had not, therefore, after all, been a night of unmixed enjoyment even to me. Tom, however, who had walked home with Dr. Blackburn and Captain Smythe, announced as soon as he came in that he had never enjoyed a walk more in his life, 'just because they had got rid of all the girls,' adding that 'he was quite sure all the other fellows thought the same.' So, as mama said, 'It was well they were all gratified.'

Next day Marianne and I spent several hours at the hospital to make up for our remissness for the last three days, reading, and playing, and singing to the poor patients; and playing chess with those who were sufficiently recovered to enjoy it. Dr. Blackburn, who had just come out from Edinburgh, bringing with him the illustrated papers for the week, looked



in upon us for a moment just as we were going away, and delayed us half an hour longer, arranging and distributing them. In the afternoon we walked to the farmhouse, and spent the evening there, finding Mary and Lizzie exceedingly indignant that we had been so long of coming. Nor did our explanation of the cause more than half mollify them, as they said it was very shabby not to have asked them to go with us too; four gentlemen were quite enough for eight girls in the country, and for an impromptu thing like that, etc. In spite of this little breeze, however, we had a pleasant evening, and got home only a few minutes before papa, who had been dining at Colston Hill, in company with some of the members of the British Association whom Sir James Elphinstone was entertaining.

‘I met your friend, Mr. Scott, there,’ papa said, as he walked up and down the room in his usual way after he came home, and quite unconsciously resting his eyes on Harriet.

‘My friend!’ said Harriet, drawing herself up and colouring (no wonder either, from the way the remark was made—and yet papa meant nothing by it; in fact, a love affair might have gone on before his eyes day after day, and papa would never have found it out). ‘What do you mean, papa?’

‘He is not an enemy, I suppose?’ said papa, after a prolonged look of astonishment at her. ‘I meant that you—all of you, in fact—are better acquainted with him than I. He is a very pleasant young man,—not a great deal to say in company, but very agreeable.’

‘Did he come home with you?’ asked mama.

‘No, he was riding, I think; the Doctor and I walked home together. Really he must be a most talented lad that,’ papa went on, referring to the Doctor. ‘Some of the *savants* to-night were speaking in the highest terms of a work of his on natural science, which, it seems, has gone through four editions within the last twelve months. I was rather astonished, I must say, that he had never mentioned it to me.’

‘You never hear of anything Dr. Blackburn does from himself,’ I could not help observing, both as a sort of defence of

Dr. Blackburn, and also because I thought papa appeared a little hurt at the seeming want of confidence; but I had no sooner said the words than I wished I had not, as I saw the faintest *souppçon* of a smile curl Harriet's lip, though she did not raise her eyes from the flowers with which she was playing. It is strange one can't venture to say honestly out what one thinks, without being laughed at by some one in this odd world of ours!

'Blackburn and Morton have come to a regular collision, it seems,' papa said, abruptly turning to another subject. 'I had heard of it before, but I had no idea that it was really serious. He told me, coming along to-night, how it was. Morton had met him on the road, one day in the beginning of last week, and, without the smallest preamble, attacked him in the most violent manner for keeping up the "prejudice" (as he calls it) among the work-people against the chapel. He even threatened him with legal proceedings, unless he would engage to cease the interference. The man must be mad, or he forgets he is not in Rome!'

'But he has lived long enough here surely to know that legal steps would avail him nothing in such a case in a free country,' said mama.

'Blackburn is not positive that the word he used was "legal,"' papa answered; 'but the warning was to the effect that, if he continued the same course, he would make him repent it. *He had the power*, he said, and he would *use* it. Blackburn could make nothing of his expressions, one way or another. He was so confounded at the outbreak, he says, that he could but think the man had gone suddenly mad.'

'His conduct altogether of late has been exceedingly like it,' said mama again. 'What can be Mr. Scott's reason for retaining such a man as his factor?'

'His father put him in the post,' said papa; 'and I suppose he would not wish to remove any one whom he had placed there if it can possibly be avoided.'

'But if he is totally unfitted for it?' mama began.

'Oh, but he is behaving very differently now; all that was

before Mr. Scott came back,' said Tom, laying down a book he had taken up, and joining in the talk ; 'he has quite turned over a new leaf since then—that is, since he couldn't help it. He's not like the same man, all the people say, this last week, that he has been for a year past. Robbie says, "He's as quate as a cat, noo the Laird's here to look after him."'

'And I suspect he's as little to be trusted as the cat,' said I, laughing. 'He can't change his nature ; and you will see his good behaviour won't last longer than he can possibly help. Remember I foretell that.'

I was not mistaken.





## CHAPTER XII.

### SOCIETY.

‘What made the ball so fine? Robin Adair.  
What made the assembly shine? Robin was there.’

**B**RIGHT shone the morning of the 1st of August,—my eighteenth birthday and Tom’s, and good Sir John Maitland’s birthday *fête*,—bright enough to give pleasure in itself, apart from any events it might bring along with it.

I had an early walk in the garden by myself, in the sweet morning sunshine, before any one else was astir; and a meditation over the years that had passed, and on this new year of my life that had opened to-day, recalling also many of Mr. and Mrs. Lambert’s kind counsels to me, which I had not been thinking of as much as I ought during the last few weeks. And I asked the Lord to keep me and guide me in this and all coming years (me and all dear to me), and to ‘choose my inheritance for me’ in all things. And, having thus begun the year with my heavenly Father, I hastened back to the house to prayers; and then to receive, with Tom, the kisses and good wishes of every one, and the birthday remembrances (a beautiful desk from papa, a work-box from mama, a beautiful copy of Scott’s poems from Marianne, and of Moore’s poems from Harriet, and equally pretty gifts to Tom) which they had secretly provided for us, besides a whole budget of birthday wishes by post. It was a bright breakfast-table that August morning.

Our cousins from the farmhouse came early in the forenoon,

to bring their good wishes to us, and say good-bye to Louisa and Marian, who were going home that day, and we had a merry forenoon, both in the garden and at the mid-day dinner prepared for them. After dinner, our dear cousins Louy and Marian went away after a mutually happy visit,—Tom, who could not be persuaded to come with us to Woodlands, accompanying them to Edinburgh to see them off. Then Mary and Lizzie went away also, and we were left to ourselves, feeling the blank not a little.

Then we had to look at our evening dresses, especially mine (a white net over white silk, which I had got for the school party in June, and had not unfolded since), and to put some ornamental touches to them, which girls who have no 'Cinderella's godmother' to equip them must do for themselves. Mama had an income (about four hundred a year) of her own, which was a good addition to the country stipend, and made things comfortable in the old Manse, which otherwise would scarcely have been the case; and she was very good in giving us liberal allowances, as well as many other indulgences (such as sending Louisa to school with me, which was so great a pleasure and advantage to both of us). But she never countenanced us in any extravagance, which, indeed, with so many of us at home, there was no room for; and the girls sometimes found it difficult to get as many changes of dress as they would have liked for all the parties they went to, and which their thirty pounds a year would not supply. Mama rather limited them, indeed, in regard to their gaieties also, as she considered much of that at a time to be injurious both to mind and body, and did not like them to accept invitations for more than one party in a week (and I think we all see now that she was very right). She was thoroughly tired of our dissipation this last week, but, of course, that was exceptional, owing to our cousins' visit, and was not likely to occur soon again.

'What an age it seems since I wore this!' I said to Marianne when Nurse had brought back my dress, which she had been ironing over; 'and yet it is only six weeks. I wonder what will have happened before another six weeks are over;' and I

half sighed, without a particle of sentiment or foreboding, however, in the sigh.

‘One thing will have happened, in all likelihood,’ answered Marianne,—‘our visit to Westermuir will be over, and we will have seen the dear old place once more. I wonder if our names will all be on the laburnum-tree yet, as Willie wrote them when we came away (there have been no children in the Manse since to destroy them), and the garden, and the swing in the old barn, and the grass-plot before the front door that used to be so full of beautiful crocuses. Oh, I remember them all as if it were yesterday! I wonder, Ellie, that you would not like to go too; but I suppose it can’t be this time.’

This was a visit, long talked of and long delayed, which Mr. and Mrs. Wood, our successors in Westermuir, had often urged, and which was now definitely settled to be paid early this month—Friday the 8th being the day fixed for the journey, if all went well. Marianne, Tom, and Harry were to accompany mama and papa, and Harriet and I were to keep house and have our holiday trip to Glasgow afterwards. This was the state of matters at present, and Marianne looked forward with the greatest pleasure to the little tour, as she did in the meantime to the festivities before her that night.

Bright and sunny, as I have said, was that day to its very close (for the preparation for a party was very often the part of it which I most enjoyed), and a great deal of talking and laughing Marianne and I had over our early tea in anticipating the evening’s amusement. Harriet, as usual, was much quieter on this subject, as indeed she was on most others, and heard all Marianne’s playful forecasting of the order in which events were likely to be with scarcely a remark. She had been working most assiduously at her bazaar work all the afternoon, and hardly laid it down even for tea, and evidently was entirely preoccupied with her own thoughts.

Soon after we had gone up-stairs to dress, Nurse appeared in triumph at our doors, exhibiting three splendid bouquets, which she informed us had just been sent from Dalmany with ‘Mr. Scott’s compliments,’ and one which had been left at the

same time by Robbie Gourlay 'for Miss Heelen;' and she had scarcely delivered the two messages when Betsy followed, bearing other three no less magnificent bouquets, with 'Mr. Farquharson's compliments.'

'Thae Dalmary flures an' thae ither anes are oot o' glass-hooses, nae doot, an' Robbie's are jist gairden anes; but I'm no shure but Robbie's is the bonniest for a' that,' said Nurse, turning them round and round in her hand and gazing at them admiringly.

'Robbie is always mindful of me,' I said, admiring the flowers, as they deserved.

'I'll take this, if you have no objections, Ellie,' said Harriet, taking Robbie's bouquet from Nurse; 'I would rather have it than these; garden flowers are much prettier at this season.'

'Of course you are welcome to them,' I said, with some reluctance; 'but then, what am I to do? Am I to take Mr. Scott's bouquet or Mr. Farquharson's? and what will either of them care to see *me* with their flowers?'

'Now, Ellie, don't be absurd,' rejoined Harriet impatiently; 'what does it signify who has them? I daresay they have both been sending bouquets to other ladies as well, and won't remember these in particular.'

I did not think that likely, but, of course, not being exactly informed as to the proceedings or mental condition of the gentlemen in question, I could make no reply. Nurse, however, had less scruple in answering for them.

'Na, na,' she said, with a knowing look; 'Miss Harrit docsna think that,—nae fears o' aither the tane or the t'other sendin' onything to other leddies; an' Miss Heelen kens as weel as me that the Laird wad be unco vext gin he thoct *she* lichtlicd his flures. Ye'll *hae* to tak' ane o' them, Miss Harrit,' she added coaxingly. Nurse had quite thrown over Mr. Farquharson and every one else now, in her zeal in the supposed cause of 'the Laird.'

'Don't you think she should take one of each, Nurse?' said Marianne, with mock seriousness; 'that would please them both at once.'

‘Noo, Miss Marianne, dinna you pit her aff’t,’ said Nurse reprovingly; ‘ye ken *ye’re* no’ heedin’ for onything the folk here can gie ye. But Miss Harrit maun be ceevil; an’ ’deed I dinna think it wad be very ceevil to pit Robbie Gourlay abune the Laird like that.’

‘Oh, nonsense, Nurse,’ said Harriet, at once ending the discussion. ‘Ellie, you will give me those flowers, won’t you?’

Of course I would, and did, as she seemed so much in earnest. So Robbie’s flowers went with Harriet; Marianne took one of Mr. Farquharson’s bouquets which she particularly admired, and I one of Mr. Scott’s; and the others were committed to Nurse, to be placed in glasses for the adornment of the drawing-room.

Lady Maitland had insisted on sending her carriage for us, for which consideration Harriet, at least, was properly grateful, as an open gig on this occasion would not at all have been to her taste, and no other vehicle was procurable in the village. It was, then, in all the dignity of a carriage and pair that we drove up the long avenue at Woodlands. The Colston Hill carriage had just preceded us, and Colonel Elphinstone was handing out his sisters when we also drew up.

‘Oh, there’s that prince of puppies, Colonel Elphinstone,’ said Marianne, glancing from the carriage-window. ‘How I wish *he* had stayed at home! Tell me something impertinent to say to him, if he asks me to dance to-night.’

‘Are you handsome enough to dance with Colonel Elphinstone, Marianne?’ asked Harriet, laughing.

‘And will papa pass muster with him?’ said I, also laughing. ‘You know he always inquires before every introduction (with his intolerable affected lisp), “Who’th her father?”’

‘Lady Charlotte must be anxious to be married, else she would never look at him,’ observed Marianne, as the steps were let down, and presently we were mingling in the stream of arrivals in the spacious and well-lighted hall.

Sir John and Lady Maitland stood near the door, in the great drawing-room, in the full tide of receiving and welcoming their numerous guests. None of the fashionable *sang froid* of



the present day characterized either Sir John or his amiable lady. His welcome was, like himself, frank, genial, and hospitable; and even now, amidst his numerous avocations as host, he did not forget that this was my first public appearance as a young lady.

‘Ha, Miss Helen!’ said he to me, in his own hearty way, as he led us to seats; ‘primed for conquest, eh? We must have lots of partners to-night; mustn’t give away our hearts altogether, though—that would never do. Your sister, here, has none to lose, I suppose;’ and, with an arch glance at Marianne, he hastened away.

Notwithstanding the friendly reassurance of Sir John, however, I confess to feeling somewhat bewildered at first, and glad to sit down on the low chair he had found for me. Confused enough the scene appeared just then to my dazzled and inexperienced eyes. The long suite of rooms looked like an enchanted palace, glittering with flowers and light, while sounds of what seemed literally the ‘music of the spheres’ filled my ears. Fairy figures in gossamer robes, with flower-wreathed and jewelled heads, glided before me, talking and laughing with the darker forms who moved beside them; and it was some minutes before I grew accustomed to the light, and could perceive that they were only common mortals—ladies and gentlemen—dancing a quadrille!

Harriet and Marianne seemed quite at their ease, and, indeed, in their element here. The possession of any one gift, whether beauty, wealth, or genius, gives one a wonderful independence as to position in a ball-room as well as elsewhere; and they had beauty, which of itself sufficed to place them upon a level with any there; while poor I, who had no such power, was only feeling my own insignificance. Well, ’twas not pleasant.

Harriet was already hemmed in by a *cordon* of gentlemen, amongst whom I soon distinguished Mr. Scott. Marianne was talking gaily to Captain Craufurd, her unfailing cavalier at an evening party as elsewhere. Colonel Elphinstone, eyeglass in hand, stood talking to Lady Charlotte Hayes, to

whom, report had it, he was engaged; while the Miss Elphinstones, the Miss Craufurds, and others near me, had each her own special acquaintance to talk to. Only I had nobody; and, 'alike unknowing and unknown,' I sat with no very enviable feelings, thinking that of all solitudes the greatest is to be 'alone in a crowd.'

By and by the quadrille ended, and another succeeded, speedily followed by a waltz and galop; and, as I knew nobody, and nobody as yet seemed to know me, I was left to the somewhat philosophical occupation of watching the other ladies led from their seats, and led back again by their respective partners; and in the amusement I really felt in this, my own solitude was forgotten. Harriet and Marianne had long ago disappeared in the vortex, and I had only occasional glimpses of their white dresses as they floated past me in the dance, talking and laughing gaily with their respective partners.

I was watching the progress of a quadrille forming, when my attention was arrested by the conversation of a couple who stood before me, and who seemed to have been employing their eyes much in the same way as mine had been.

'Tell me, Fred,' said the lady, 'who do you consider the belle of the evening?'

'Aw——,' said her companion, in a fashionable drawl (which I at once recognised as Colonel Elphinstone's), and at the same time levelling his glass, 'let me thee. Well (prethent company ekthepted), I think I thould thay that Mith—aw——I forget her name—Mith Fitth-Jameth.'

'But which of them?'

'Oh, the dark one, of courthe. Thecott'th flame.'

'Fred,' interposed another voice reprovingly (Miss Elphinstone's), 'you don't mean really that you think Reginald is *épris* with that girl,—a poor clergyman's daughter? *Of course*, he can mean nothing.'

'Don't know,' said her brother, with an intercepted yawn. 'Thecott, I prethume, ith equal to managing hith own affairth. Did you with me to athk hith intenthonth?'

What Miss Elphinstone might have replied I did not hear, as the figure of the dance at that moment separated her from her brother ; but I had heard enough. 'Scott's flame !' 'Mean nothing,' indeed ! I glanced at Harriet. Mr. Scott and she stood at the top of the quadrille ; and, as she walked down the long room, her tulle robes floating like a cloud about her, I quite agreed with Nurse's valedictory remark, that 'there was nane like her.' Unusually lovely she looked at that moment—her starry eyes bright, and her delicate cheek 'tinted' with animation and conscious triumph. I thought any one might be proud to dance with her. And Mr. Scott fully satisfied me in that respect. Proud both of and for her, he certainly looked ; and, 'in form and gesture proudly eminent,' I do not know that he had his own equal at that moment in the room. Still, the words I had overheard rung in my ears, and I determined to catch Harriet at the end of the quadrille, and remonstrate with her for permitting this flirtation.

Just then Captain Craufurd came up, and asked me to take the next dance with him ; to which I acceded not unwillingly. It was a galop, and I enjoyed it excessively, not being on any ceremony as to talk with my old playmate, Captain Alick, who, if (as wits alleged) 'he was not exactly a Solomon,' was at all events good-hearted, and always pleasant. At the end of the dance he insisted on my going with him to get an ice ; so that I had no opportunity of speaking to Harriet, as I intended.

In the refreshment-room we found, amongst several other couples, Mr. Scott and his cousin, Miss Elphinstone, the latter of whom did not appear to know me ; so, of course, I made no recognition either. Mr. Scott did, however. He came forward at once and cordially shook hands, asking me at the same time to honour him with the next quadrille, if not otherwise engaged,—which, as I had no engagements at all, it was easy to promise ; and, Miss Elphinstone and he returning almost immediately to the dancing-room, I was left to the enjoyment of ices and of Captain Craufurd's conversation. I

do wonder more and more, the longer I live, what other girls find to say to the young men they dance with. I never realized before what an amount of *talent* it requires to keep up a flow of small-talk ; and, if I never envied any one before, I certainly did then, while racking my brains to find something to speak about. My escort, however, did not seem the least at a loss.

‘Iees are very pleasant when one is heated,’ he began.

I assented, of course.

‘Do you know, Miss Helen, the fellows here are all so terribly afraid of you !’ was the next ebullition of his wisdom. ‘It’s not true, is it, that you have come home so dreadfully “blue,” and that you speak Latin and Greek, and go in for “women’s rights,” and lady-doctors ?’

I could not help laughing. ‘Would it shock you so very much, Captain Alick ?’

Captain Craufurd opened his honest, stupid eyes to their utmost possible extent. ‘Miss Helen ! yes,’ he said, with all his heart ; ‘they spoil nice girls altogether, those newfangled notions. Their minds aren’t so strong as men’s, you know—can’t be ; and what’s the use of trying to make them so ?’

‘*Some* girls,’ laughed I, ‘and *some* men’s. But you may set your mind quite at rest, Captain Craufurd ; I certainly can’t speak either Latin or Greek, and I don’t know what “women’s rights” are. As for lady-doctors, I wouldn’t like to trust them myself ; so why should I wish them for others ?’

‘Upon my word I’m glad to hear it,’ was the rejoinder, as earnestly as if it had been a matter of life and death. ‘Won’t I let those fellows know that they are quite in the dark about you altogether ? You see, no fellow likes a “strong-minded woman.” But I’ll tell you what we’ll do, Miss Helen,’ as a bright idea struck him ; ‘take you another dance with me (I have this one free), and we’ll let them see that you’re up to everything as well as the best of them.’

Poor Captain Alick ! his intellect must certainly have evaporated to make room for his heart, which was the largest in the world ! But it was no use to be angry.

'You are lucky to have so few engagements, Miss Helen,' he went on, glancing at my programme, which might as well have been a sheet of blank paper, for any use it was to me. 'Fancy! I'm engaged for every dance after this next one—three of the round ones to my sisters. I don't know, I'm sure, what they would do if I were to get married, for I think I pay them more attention than any other fellow. But, to be sure,' catching himself up suddenly, 'that's not likely to be in a hurry.'

'Quite right, Captain Craufurd,' said I; 'we always tell Tom that a man who has sisters should never marry.'

'Miss Marianne does not think that,' said the poor Captain morosely, betraying the inward wound.

'Oh, Marianne thinks so too,' I said, wilfully misunderstanding him; 'she would be as sorry as we, if Tom were to like anybody better than us.'

'I didn't mean that exactly,' said the poor lover again; 'but it's no matter now. You and I'll go up-stairs and have our dance, Miss Helen;' and, totally ignoring my decree that we had danced enough for the present, we were presently whirling in the mazes of the Schottische.

Good, honest, faithful heart! Marianne had no cause to be ashamed of a love like yours! Charlie had need to be chivalrous indeed, to surpass such lifelong devotion!

He had just replaced me in my seat when Mr. Farquharson came forward, and I had to brace myself for a mental encounter of a different sort. Mr. Farquharson was an older friend than even Captain Craufurd, having been the schoolfellow and companion of my brother Wilfrid, and I remembered him since I was a little girl, and he a tall, gentlemanly lad of fourteen. He had just been dancing with Harriet, when she must certainly have been 'ceevil' to him, as he seemed in exceedingly good spirits, which I rather wondered at, all things considered—(perhaps Miss Elphinstone had been giving him the result of her observations!).

'You have not forgotten old times, I hope, Miss Helen?' he said, shaking hands in his usual animated and cordial manner, and taking the seat beside me.

I privately thought that he had, considering that even in his own house he had merely shaken hands with me, with an animated smile, and a 'How are you, Miss Helen?' as if we had met every day during the last fifteen months. But, as I said before, I excused him.

'I saw you on the road with your sister that night last week,' he went on, apparently thinking some explanation due; 'but—you have changed a good deal during the last year,—I really scarcely recognised you.'

'None of us have grown younger in that time, Mr. Farquharson,' I said, smiling. 'Did you expect to see the school-girl that went away?'

'I expected—well, not one half of what I have seen,' he answered, looking down at me in a manner I did not know whether to take as jest or earnest. 'That may hit two ways,' thought I; 'I wonder which he means?'

He must have read the question in my face, for he looked at me rather mischievously and smiled.

'I never pay compliments,' he said.

'Then I hope you never say disagreeable things either,' I retorted, rather piqued at his cool rendering of my thought.

'Ah! that depends. If it were necessary, I daresay I could be as blunt as our great apostle and reformer, John Knox. You remember how he drew tears from poor Queen Mary with his plain speaking?'

'You would be a bear if you were to imitate John Knox,' said I, half laughing, half defiantly (for, as I have said before, I have always pitied poor Queen Mary, and think still that her character has been altogether misunderstood for the last three hundred years). 'If he had not been so harsh to her, poor thing, and had reasoned with her kindly, she might have had a happier fate. He might have told her the truth without being rude.'

'Come now, I must defend our countryman, Miss Helen. You know he never feared the face of man, and he wasn't going to fear the face of woman, even a pretty one,' he added,

laughing; 'and you will allow that your fair friend stood much in need of his good advices?'

'But I don't allow that,' said I, boldly standing my ground; 'at least—I mean that great allowances should be made for her,—more than he made. She was as sincere in her own way as he was in his, and that is one great thing. Mistaken, I grant you she was, but not wicked.'

'Ah! then the story of her murdering her husband is a pleasant little fiction?'

'Of course it is,' I said warmly, as I felt (had I not a prize poem on the subject?). 'She was incapable of such a thing. Nobody believes that old story now.'

'That settles the question then,' said he, bowing with mock gravity,—'at least as far as I am concerned, for of course I never contradict a lady. But I fear, Miss Helen, your logic will not be quite so convincing to the world at large.'

I saw that he was disposed to amuse himself at my expense, but I was not quite reconciled to Mr. Farquharson yet,—I thought he did not deserve to be received back to friendship quite so soon; besides, I had formed my own opinion on the subject, and I was not inclined to give it up.

'Nobody could think her guilty,' I said gravely and shortly, 'but those who are themselves capable of such a deed.'

Mr. Farquharson laughed outright.

'Miss Helen! what do you insinuate? I for one firmly believe in her guilt. Now, will you retract your assertion?'

But I would not. 'If you can be so cruel as take away her character,' I replied, half laughing, 'I believe you could take her life as well,—the one is worth much less than the other.'

He laughed so heartily at this, that I saw more than one pair of eyes directed towards us.

'Miss Helen! your sweeping assertions quite take away my breath. May I ask you not to mention your suspicions in public, else I fear no lady will ever be bold enough to become Mrs. Farquharson?'

I knew he was laughing at me now, so I would not reply, but gave my attention to the dancers. I felt, too, that, to the utter

disregard of all that was passing around (Harriet not being at the moment visible in the room), he was watching me, with inward amusement, no doubt,—a spar of this sort having been a favourite pastime with Mr. Stewart Farquharson from boyhood, as his good old uncle used to say admiringly of him, ‘he was born a debater.’ But I was not exactly in the mood to respond to fun at that particular moment; I was thinking of another whose conversation I would have enjoyed so much more, and whom I could not see anywhere in the room. My companion mistook my silence.

‘Please don’t be angry,’ he said at last, in a tone that was meant to be penitent. ‘What apology must I make? I can’t say I believe Queen Mary innocent, you know, when I don’t, but I can truly say I am sorry I can’t. Will that do?’

It was my turn to laugh now, and I did. ‘I suppose it must do,’ I said.

‘I see I must give you some music some time soon, Miss Helen,’ he resumed after a pause.

‘Why?’ I asked, looking up rather wonderingly.

‘It is “the food of love,” you know,’ said he, looking at me in a manner that made me smile; ‘and there must be no dislike between us,—we have known each other too long for that.’

‘Since I was seven years old, and you—fourteen, I think? and I beat you at “four corners”!’ I said laughing.

‘Do you mean to insinuate that I am double your age, Miss Fitz-James?’

‘You were at that time,’ I said, smiling at his look; ‘but we won’t quarrel about that.’

‘No.’ Then, after a pause, ‘It was too bad of me to tease you the first night of renewing old acquaintance,’ he said, looking at me as if I had been a spoiled child that must be propitiated.

‘Oh no,’ I said, looking up and smiling; ‘it was all in fun, I knew that. Besides,’ I added, reflection having already come, ‘I must confess, too, for I ought not to have spoken as I did about John Knox; he was a splendid man,—Scotland’s glory! It was only his manner that was in fault; and a



Scotchman was right to defend him. So we must sign a mutual contract of forgiveness.'

'Seal the contract, then, by taking this dance with me,' said Mr. Farquharson, as the music at that moment resolved itself into a galop, offering his arm in the friendly pleasant manner of old. 'Will you do me the honour?'

'With the greatest pleasure,' I said, rising to accompany him; and we were soon in the midst of the brilliant throng, flying round as on the wings of the wind, for I was with a perfect dancer, who carried me almost without volition on my part, as if we were blown along the floor by a gale.

The dance was a long one, and I had scarcely resumed my seat when Mr. Scott came forward to claim me for the quadrille. I rose with some trepidation to accompany him, for I knew he was an exquisite in dancing as in other things; however, that had to be gone through like the rest, and I flattered myself, as I took his arm, that at least he could not see my nervousness. I never can appear to advantage with people who I know do not understand me, and who cannot look beyond externals, and take those qualities which I really do possess as compensation for those more obvious ones which I want. This was what I always felt with Mr. Scott. Admirer of beauty as I knew him to be, and endowed liberally in the matter of externals himself, he was not likely to look (as *some* people could do) below a plain unattractive surface for any good qualities lying hid within. I was too much occupied with my own dancing during the first figure to observe my companion, or to respond to the various persevering attempts he made at conversation. Gradually, however, I became more assured.

'Your *fête* the other evening was a great success, Miss Helen,' was the first remark I really heard, as he took my hand for the final turn in the second figure; 'I have never had an opportunity of saying so before. You see I did right to go, though you did your best to prevent me.'

'I am glad you enjoyed it, Mr. Scott,' I said. 'I was afraid my tea might have been too much for you.'

He laughed at the recollection.

‘No, indeed ; very much the reverse, I assure you.’

All the time he had been speaking, and, indeed, from the commencement of the quadrille, I had been debating in my own mind whether or not I ought to say something about the bouquets he had sent us. Perhaps Marianne had done so already—Harriet, I well knew, would not ; if so, my thanks would be superfluous. How I wished I had asked mama what it was best to do ! but of course it was too late now ; nor could all Mrs. Lambert’s careful instructions as to lady-like deportment guide me in this. I concluded, however, that as I carried one of the bouquets, it was but polite to make some allusion to it, and the latter remarks had broken the ice. I went at it boldly.

‘It was so kind of you to send those lovely flowers, Mr. Scott,’ I said ; ‘we were so much obliged for them.’

Mr. Scott bowed rather coldly. It was not very encouraging.

(‘Can he be angry because *I* have his flowers and Harriet not?’ thought I. ‘I was sure he would. It is very provoking ; as if I had wished them, when I would much rather have had Robbie’s.’)

‘Harriet had another bouquet sent her at the same time,’ I went on, not knowing what else to say. ‘A *beautiful* one also.’

‘Indeed ! May I inquire whose exquisite taste has called forth such admiration ?’

The tone of this last remark in part opened my eyes. ‘Nurse was right,’ I thought ; ‘he is angry that Harriet has “lichtlied” his bouquet.’

I determined then to speak out.

‘Oh, it was an old friend of ours in the village,’ I explained. ‘He is a gardener, and he always sends us a bouquet when he hears that we are going to a party. But I forgot you saw him ; it was that old man Gourlay,—don’t you remember, Mr. Scott, he sat beside us at the meeting ?’

Mr. Scott’s face flushed.

'Ah yes, I remember,' he said, a shade of something, I could not tell what, in his tone. 'Rather a character, if I recollect?'

'A better character than some other people,' thought I, remembering the pique he had manifested towards Robbie for having taken the prizes at the flower-show, and the feeling he seemed to have kept up ever since. It was really very wicked of Mr. Scott to keep up such feelings.

'He is a dear, good old man,' I said determinedly, aloud. 'We have known him since we were little things; and Harriet would not hurt his feelings by not taking his flowers,' I added, giving Harriet rather more than her due, in my wish to speak up for Robbie.

'Certainly not,' said Mr. Scott warmly. 'Miss Fitz-James was quite right; I honour her for it.'

The quadrille was now ended; but, instead of restoring me to my seat, Mr. Scott led me for a promenade into the conservatory, which was brilliantly lighted with coloured lamps, and looked to me like a scene in fairyland. The change was quite exhilarating from the crowded and heated ball-room, and seemed to inspirit my companion as much as myself, for I had never found him so conversable before.

'Your friend, I understand, Miss Helen, was extremely successful at the exhibition last month?' he said, as we were examining a splendid variegated geranium.

'Yes,' I said, rather dubious of pursuing this topic. 'I am so glad he had a little pleasure; for, poor man, he has had a great many troubles! His eldest daughter disappeared about two years ago in the strangest manner (by the way, she went as companion, or maid, to a relation of yours, Mr. Scott,—Lady Jane). She went out one day, just as usual, to take a walk, and never was heard of again!'

'Indeed!' was the cold rejoinder.

'She was the loveliest girl I ever saw,' I went on (too intent on enlisting his sympathy, and perhaps aid, in the cause, to notice this). 'Not at all like a village girl—but, to be sure, you have seen her.'

‘I?’ said Mr. Scott, drawing himself up,—‘I?’

Certainly he was a haughty man! What more natural than to suppose he should occasionally have seen his grandmother’s companion?

‘I beg your pardon, Mr. Scott,’ I said rather coldly, in my turn; for I was indignant at his want of feeling. ‘I thought you might perhaps take some interest in her, from her being such a favourite with Lady Jane. Her father is in great distress about her,’ I added once more, changing my tone to a pleading one. ‘It would be such a relief if he could only hear *something!*’

‘I am sorry I cannot further your kind wishes, Miss Fitz-James,’ said he, in the same haughty tone.

However, I think he must have seen, on reflection, that I meant no offence, as he presently introduced a new topic, and was extremely agreeable until we returned to the drawing-room.

I enjoyed the rest of the evening exceedingly. Not altogether, however; for, though I had dancing to my heart’s content (my dance and promenade with Mr. Scott having apparently stamped my position as to that), I kept continually wondering why somebody I knew had been invited—and without whom the room seemed empty to me—had not appeared. True, he might have been detained professionally; but what if he were not able to come at all? It was possible. After all, what business was it of mine? What had I to do with it? Yes, I had something; one can’t help interesting one’s self in one’s friends; and he was a friend, at any rate. Whether any one else missed him, I could not tell; I thought not.

In the meantime I had been dancing a *valse à deux temps* with a young German officer whom Sir John had introduced to me, and had just been replaced on a low *fauteuil*, in a deep window-recess, when I saw Mr. Scott approach me, and with him, to my horror, the redoubted Colonel Elphinstone, whom he introduced to me. That the Colonel had not sought the introduction, nor desired it any more than I did, I was convinced; and I felt considerably annoyed when the request was drawled out to me, with his usual *nonchalance*,—

'Aw——, may I have the pleathure of—aw——, let me thee,—not the fourth—nor the fifth—nor—aw—— thixth,—but the—theventh danthe after thith ?'

I had scarcely time to give any sort of assent to this, when he walked away. Presently, a current of air blowing in upon us from the window, my German friend proposed I should change my seat, and led me to a sofa at a little distance. An unfortunate change, as it happened. My new seat was close to the door of an ante-room, where several young men were lounging in the usual party-fashion, discussing their respective partners ; and, although I was trying to keep up a conversation in German with Captain Hirsch, I could not avoid hearing some of their remarks.

'I bet fifty to one,' said a voice, 'that Scott makes a match of it !'

'Shades of the Scotts forfend !' said another. 'A poor clergyman's daughter ! the ancestors would walk out of their graves at the very idea !'

'She's a stunner, though !' said a third. 'I'll back Scott ! With a rent-roll like his, I wouldn't answer for myself. What do you say, Elphinstone ?'

'Aw——,' drawled out that gentleman. 'Let me thee,—Thecott'th wife would be thome thort of relation of mine, wouldn't the ? Aw——, well,—tho long ath the'th neither a Gorgon nor a cook, I thuppothe I'll be dethently thivil to the girl.'

I get the credit of having a tolerable temper in general, but I confess my blood boiled at this ; and this man had presumed to ask me to dance ! My companion must have found me rather hazy, I fear, as I hardly heard what he said ; but more was yet to come.

'The fair one is passable enough,' resumed a voice that had spoken before,—'steps out rather well, too ; but that third one is nothing at all—she's a positive fright.'

I was wondering if Marianne and myself could have been alluded to, when an unmistakable voice put it beyond a doubt.

‘Aw——,’ it said, ‘what have I ever done to offend Thecott, that he thould have introduthed me to her. *Of courthe*, I made it a quadrille. I don’t thuppothe I could ever have thurvived a thircle danthe with her.’

Could this be what he called ‘decently civil’? Surely not. I was certainly not a cook; he must, then, have thought me a Gorgon!—not flattering. I took my resolution then and there,—nothing should induce me to dance with Colonel Elphinstone! I have a dim impression that some one spoke up for me, and pronounced me ‘stunning clever;’ but the words and the aspersions that preceded them vanished alike from my mind as, at that moment, I caught sight of Dr. Blackburn. He seemed to have but just arrived, and was speaking to Lady Maitland; and I wondered how long it would be before he saw me. How well he looked! his tall handsome form so well suited to his evening costume—his fine head and manly bearing distinguishing him, even in this aristocratic assembly. Somehow Dr. Blackburn had a look of power and of purpose about him which made you feel at once that he was no mere drawing-room man. His conversation with ladies was never trifling or silly; and a compliment from him was a compliment indeed.

I watched him as he made his way up the room, recognising and talking now to this person, now to that; and it was with a strange indefinite feeling that I observed the glow that overspread his countenance when he caught sight of Harriet; the *empressement* with which he hastened to greet her, and her smiling welcome to him. Surely it could not be pain to find he appreciated my sister? Oh no, I could not be so selfish! and yet, whatever it was, it kept possession of me, and rivetted my eyes on all their movements. Surely she must have expected him, and reserved this dance for him, as they almost immediately took their places in the quadrille then forming. Yes, they were fitted for each other—I could not but confess it; and, if one pang of envy crossed my mind at that moment, of my sister’s irresistible beauty, and its power of pleasing him, gentle reader, blame me not! Perhaps

you, too, have had your moments of weakness ; and, if so, you can sympathize with mine.

But apparently their movements seemed to interest another as well as me. Leaning against a pillar at the far end of the room stood Mr. Scott ; a flush was on his forehead, as if some annoyance had hold of him, and his eyes were rivetted on the dancers with an expression I could not read, but in which anger, dissatisfaction, and some deeper feeling seemed strangely mingled. Occasionally, too, he seemed to ponder something very deeply, and once I saw him draw himself proudly up, while ‘all the blood of all the Scotts’ seemed to speak in his face. I wondered if any one else observed him. Harriet did, I was sure, as I noticed once or twice her colour heightened ; but, of course, that might have been in speaking to Dr. Blackburn. I had ample leisure for my observations, as my German acquaintance, disgusted, no doubt, with my blundering his beloved Deutschen, had betaken himself elsewhere, and left me to myself.

The quadrille ended, and the couples slowly promenaded past me. Among the last came Dr. Blackburn and Harriet, the latter radiant. She caught sight of me, and, turning her companion, came up to me for the first time that evening, all smiles, to ask, ‘Was it not a delightful party?’ and ‘Who had I been dancing with?’ Dr. Blackburn’s start, when he saw me, showed that he had not been previously aware of my vicinity.

‘Miss Helen!’ said he, with all his own pleasantness of manner (whatever other feelings might be in his mind at the time, he certainly seemed glad to see me); ‘I could not see you anywhere.’

He *had* looked for me, then ! What a strange thrill of pleasure the words gave me ! Before I could reply, Sir John came up to us with a gentleman, whom he introduced to Harriet as Lord Dunraith ; and Dr. Blackburn, resigning his partner, sat down beside me.

‘Your sister has quite recovered from her accident,’ were his first words, as he looked after Harriet ; ‘I am glad to see her able to enjoy the dancing.’

‘I don’t believe she has sat a single dance,’ I said, smiling.

‘And you, — what have you been about?’ he asked.  
‘Dancing a great deal?’

‘Oh, a little.’

‘Suppose we take a turn now?’ he said, rising and glancing round.

‘But this is a circle dance, Dr. Blackburn. You don’t dance that?’

‘Won’t you try me?’ said he with a smile, at the same time holding out his hand.

Would I not? though it had been over red-hot ploughshares! As Marianne had said, he was a splendid dancer! He did not talk, as Captain Craufurd had kept doing, during the whole of my dance with him; and, as we floated round the room to the music of a delicious waltz, with the brilliant lights, the perfumed air, and, above all, his strong arm bearing me up, I had a vague, dreamy, and delicious sensation, as if I had for ever escaped from the grosser scenes of earth, and was being borne on and on in some enchanted region of ether, where all was music, and flowers, and — and — him. And when at length we paused for a moment to take breath, I was still in the dream.

‘Do you like it?’ said Dr. Blackburn, as we stood.

My face must have answered for me, as he smiled, and presently carried me on again before I had spoken a word.

The music stopped at last, and the spell was broken; only partly, however, as Dr. Blackburn, laughingly complaining that we had only had half a dance, engaged me for the next quadrille also. It was the famous ‘theventh;’ but I disposed of it with no compunction. He sat down beside me; but presently starting up again, as if he had forgotten something,—

‘Your sister promised to reserve one dance for me,’ he said, looking round, as if in search of some one. ‘I must ascertain which it is;’ and he disappeared.

Was I growing selfish?—jealous of my own sister? It would appear so, for the words gave me a pang sharper than any I



had ever known before. I reproached myself for the feeling, but it would not do, it seemed at that moment as if Harriet was my *bête noire*—the one bitter drop that poisoned my cup of happiness; and the relief was almost painful when I perceived that it was Marianne, not Harriet, whom he sought, and led forward to join the Lancers, then about to commence. I had forgotten that I was myself engaged for this dance; and, my partner now coming up, I had to recall my thoughts to the work before me.

Dr. Blackburn was leading me to my place in the quadrille, when Colonel Elphinstone languidly approached, glass in eye, looking about, I well knew for whom. With a slight recognition of my companion, he addressed himself, with an equally slight bow, to me.

‘Aw——, I think I remember athking you for thith danthe?’

My face burned—the more so as several of his friends were within hearing.

‘Perhaps you did, Colonel Elphinstone,’ I managed to say, with indifference as great as his own, at the same time retaining my hold of Dr. Blackburn’s arm (in fact, I rather admired myself for the coolness of the reply—I can so seldom act out my vindictive impulses, even when hurt or wounded).

‘Aw——, then,’ to Dr. Blackburn, ‘I’ll relieve you,’ at the same time proffering his aristocratic elbow to me.

Dr. Blackburn’s eyes flashed fire.

‘Since Miss Fitz-James has honoured me,’ he said, ‘I certainly have no intention of resigning her;’ and with a slight bow we passed on; while the Colonel, with a ludicrously discomfited air, retired.

Intolerable puppy as Colonel Elphinstone was, I confess to some slight feeling of remorse when I heard the laughter of his companions, and their assertions that he had met his match. Something of this I could not help expressing to Dr. Blackburn, explaining to him also the manner in which I had been asked, my assent not having been even waited for (the not too flattering remarks I had overheard I kept to myself). He completely reassured me on that point.

‘We all know Colonel Elphinstone,’ said he, with a smile. ‘I don’t think you need have many compunctions in regard to him.’

My rose was now without a thorn, and I enjoyed its sweets to the full. Ah, how kind he was ! How he listened to my every word, both during the dance and in the long promenade that followed, as no one had ever done before ! And I—I wanted nothing else. For me ‘there was but one beloved face on earth, and that was shining on me.’ If the waltz had been a dream, this was the awaking. Whatever *his* feelings might be, mine I could no longer mistake. And as in the first moments of consciousness but one prominent idea presents itself to the mind, and that but vaguely, so it was now with me. No considerations of Harriet, or of aught else, had intruded as yet. That was to come. The future I thought not of ; the present was all in all. I was with *him*, and at least he did not hate me ! No, he did not hate me.

I sat beside him at supper, at which I must have been unusually silent, as I caught his eyes fixed on me once or twice with a strange questioning expression which I could not fathom. At last he spoke.

‘You are very quiet, Miss Helen,’ he said, in his own pleasant tone. ‘When did you and I sit so silent before ? I shall begin to think you repent your seat.’

‘Repent !’ cried I impulsively ; but, as the thought rushed upon me, how *very* different was the reality, the words that would have followed died on my lips, and the colour rushed in torrents over my face and neck. I dared not look at Dr. Blackburn, or, indeed, look up at all. Two minutes I sat thus, in painful confusion, wishing the friendly floor would only open and hide me ! But when at last I raised my head, every thought of myself vanished at sight of Dr. Blackburn’s face, so ghastly had it become. It stunned me for a moment ; then I exclaimed (how no one else heard is a mystery to me to this day ; I suppose they were all too full of themselves),—

‘Dr. Blackburn ! what is the matter ? You are ill !’

‘No, no,’ said he hastily ; ‘this room is stifling,’ at the

same time intercepting a glass of water which a servant was carrying past on a waiter.

'Something is the matter,' I cried again, as his pallor still continued. 'Oh, what can it be?'

Something must have been in my tone that I had not intended; for he turned suddenly, and seemed quite to forget himself, looking at me.

'Nay, Miss Helen, you forget it is my prerogative to question,' he said. 'What has made *you* look so pale?'

'I thought you were ill,' I answered, simply enough.

Dr. Blackburn abruptly poured out a glass of wine, and handed it to me.

'I prescribe this to be taken immediately,' he said. His voice was something like his own again, but his face was still the hue of ashes, and his hand, in giving me the glass, shook so much that a third part of the contents was bestowed on my dress; yet, true to his sex, who never can bear to display any little weakness, especially before ours, he made a resolute effort to disguise it; and his next question, after resuming his seat, seemed very far away.

'You have never told me yet, Miss Helen, how you enjoyed the soirée the other evening.'

'Oh, so much!' cried I, eagerly accepting the change; 'but then, you know, Dr. Blackburn, it was all new to me; I never was at such a thing before; so perhaps I am not a good judge.'

'And the songs were a great success,' he proceeded, making no direct answer to this. 'I won't make you vain, Miss Helen, by telling you all the compliments that have been paid them. Even the great Sir James Elphinstone condescended to approve; and you know,' he added, with something like his own smile,—'you know what a concession that is.'

'I don't care a great deal for *his* opinion,' said I, laughing; 'but, Dr. Blackburn, I wonder—do you think my valuable manuscripts are still tossing about in the printing office? I shouldn't like that.'

'No fear of that; the manuscripts are in safe keeping,' said

Dr. Blackburn, looking intently at the door—(and I may add here, in passing, that I afterwards found my manuscripts in a drawer in a certain desk, where I little dreamed once that I should ever find anything of mine; but that was long afterwards).

I was prevented making any reply by some one standing up at this moment to propose Sir John's health, which was drunk with enthusiasm, and to which Sir John responded in an amusing little speech, in which he invited all the present company to assemble for the same occasion that day twelve-month; when, contradictory as it might seem, he hoped to see not a 'single' person in the room; as, no doubt, ere that time, most of those now present would have changed their state 'for better, for worse.' He could see, even in looking about him that evening, shadows of 'coming events;' and, for their still greater encouragement, he could assure them from his own experience 'how much the wife is dearer than the bride;' concluding, with a touch of pathos which suited well his benignant countenance, that the best wish he could give his gentlemen friends was, that they might all be as happy in their choice as he had been himself; at which delicate tribute I could see a tear glisten in Lady Maitland's soft blue eyes. A few minutes afterwards, before Dr. Blackburn and I could resume our conversation, we were following the crowd, who were eagerly pressing back to the dancing-room.

I do not remember anything that was said during the quadrille that followed. I only know that I felt strangely happy, to which feeling a little circumstance that occurred in the course of it doubtless contributed. Mr. Scott and Harriet, in returning from the supper-room, had either failed in obtaining places in the quadrille, or had not wished to secure them, and were now sitting apart in the shadow of a curtained recess near to where we were standing, too much occupied with each other, apparently, to observe us. We were waiting our turn to dance when my eye was attracted to Harriet, as she sat, her beautiful face wearing an unwonted flush, and her eyes raised to her companion, who had risen and stood

before her, and seemed to plead for something which she was laughingly refusing to give. I did not, of course, hear what he asked ; but at this moment her glove fell, and I saw him hastily pick it up, press it to his lips, and deposit it in his pocket. Harriet remonstrated, and held out her hand for her property.

‘But, Mr. Scott,’ I heard her say, in a way that seemed to make him doubly resolute to keep his spoil, ‘what am I to do with only one glove?’

‘Give me something better, then, and I will give it up,’ was the answer. And Harriet, finding all her remonstrances vain, with a coquettish little toss of the head and a charming pout, turned quite away from him, and gave her attention to her bouquet.

I felt afraid to look at Dr. Blackburn, who I was sure had seen this little by-play as well as I ; but things never seem to turn out as we expect in this cross world of ours ! I had looked for dissatisfaction at least, if not some stronger feeling ; but I certainly never expected what I got—a smile ; a smile, too, that showed perfect appreciation of the whole affair. Truly men are unfathomable beings ! Talk of breaking their hearts, indeed ! But I would not acknowledge, even to myself, the thrill of joy this gave me. I would not analyze further ; I had found out quite enough for one night. And when the carriage was announced, and we had made our adieux to Lady Maitland, and the evening was ended, I felt as if I had lived a year since I had entered, and Sir John had warned me to take care of my heart. Ah ! had I done so ?

We met our host in the hall, returning from escorting old Mrs. Anderson of Larch Grove and her pretty little granddaughter to their carriage. Jovial as ever he looked, without a trace of fatigue on his hospitable face, even at that hour of the morning.

‘Well wrapped up, Miss Helen ?’ said he. ‘You must not take away a *cold* remembrance of my birthday, you know—that would never do ; the Doctor there will tell you that

better than I. But,' added he, in a stage aside, of which Dr. Blackburn had the full benefit as well as I, 'why have you let your sister run away with the Laird, eh? I fear it's a gone case! But never mind, Miss Helen,' with a sly look at the Doctor; 'there's as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it.'

Mr. Scott and Captain Craufurd were both standing at the carriage-door when we went out, and Nurse (whom mama always *would* send for us, wherever we went) perched on the rumble. The summer night had suddenly changed its mood, and rain was beginning to fall heavily.

'Have you an umbrella, Nurse?' called out the Doctor, after he had put me in; and Marianne, ever mindful of others and oblivious of herself, immediately let down the glass to suggest that Nurse should come inside.

'Miss Marianne's always kind,' cried Captain Craufurd, as he hurried round to the rumble to assist Nurse in her perilous descent.

'Oo, I'll tak' nae skaith,' cried Nurse's cheery tones, as usual loud enough to be universally heard; 'but I think the Doctor should gang in; he has a lang road, an' it's gettin' rael wat.'

A laugh from the gentlemen showed how this proposal was appreciated.

'That's right, Nurse,' cried Sir John; 'it would have been long before the young ladies would have made such a sensible proposal. Get in, Doctor,' he added.

But the Doctor laughed, saying he was 'weather-proof,' and Nurse, to her own great surprise, was gallantly handed down from the rumble and put inside, and we drove off.

Poor Nurse! she told me afterwards that 'she had been in the nerves a' the time, at havin' to come down from sic a height before sae mony gentlemen.'

'Eh, Miss Harrit, ye've lost ane o' your gloves!' was her immediate discovery on looking round her.

'Yes, I dropped it in the drawing-room,' was the indifferent

reply, as the ungloved hand was hastily drawn within the folds of her shawl.

Nurse would have been very conversable during the drive, if she had got any encouragement ; but Marianne was too sleepy after her dancing, and Harriet evidently disinclined for talk ; so that I was the one privileged to receive her communications about her comfortable twelve o'clock tea in the house-keeper's room, and 'the heartsome sounds o' music and dancin' that had gone on above,' quite ignoring the fact that we had heard it all ourselves. Her details, however, were so few, and so well chosen for the present company, as to make me suspicious that I was destined to receive a second and fuller edition, in the strictest confidence, in the shape of Mr. Frew the butler's opinion of the ladies, etc.

For once in my life I blessed Marianne's sleepy mood, which indisposed her for the pleasant gossip which usually wound up our day. With Harriet I might have felt differently ; she would have thought her own thoughts, and allowed me to think mine undisturbed ; and, while there was always in her heart some inner chamber into which none were allowed to enter (at least as yet), she never sought to penetrate into other people's. But every thought and feeling in Marianne's transparent nature was open to me,—even her love for her beloved Charlie, who, she took for granted, was nearly as dear to me as to herself ; and she expected the same confidence from me. To-night I would have given much to be alone ; and it was with no small pleasure that I saw her go off, almost immediately, into the enchanted regions of dream-land, with scarcely a comment on the party. For me, I could not sleep. Wrapped in my dressing-gown, at the window, till the birds began to chirp in the trees and the household to stir below, I sat thinking, thinking, thinking.





## CHAPTER XIII.

### DISILLUSIONS.

‘My heart is sair, I daurna tell,  
My heart is sair for somebody.’

**T**HE sun must have completed a considerable part of his daily work before we got up next morning ; at any rate, it appeared that Harriet had—for, while we were dressing, she looked in at the door, to say that she hoped we would be ready for lunch, as papa was quite shocked at our dissipation. Marianne and I looked at each other in consternation as she withdrew.

‘Do you think Mr. Scott can have been here already?’ said Marianne, laughing at Harriet’s unwonted activity.

‘Oh, Marianne!’ said I reprovingly.

‘Oh, Ellie! as if you had not eyes in your head as well as other people, and a good deal sharper too. I think, if he means nothing after last night, he should be pulled up for it pretty quickly, that’s all.’

Perhaps something of the same kind might have been passing in my own mind, but I certainly would not have given it utterance ; and I told her that Miss Elphinstone, at least, was of a different opinion.

‘Miss Elphinstone!’ interrupted Marianne, tossing her head with superior wisdom. ‘Everybody sees she wants him for herself. You should have seen the looks she gave Harriet at supper!—but he is not for her, else I’m mistaken.’

I wondered in my own mind what mama and papa would say to all this, especially considering what Mr. Scott’s character



was said to be,—not a *little* ‘fast;’ and I hinted this to Marianne. She, however, it would appear, had taken a fancy to Mr. Scott, and would hear nothing against him.

‘Oh, well, but I don’t believe what the country people say about him,’ she said. ‘He’s a very pleasant young man, and a charming dancer. I had a long waltz with him, and he’s quite delightful.’

‘Well, I don’t understand him,’ said I. ‘I daresay he can be pleasant when he likes,—most people can,—but that is certainly not always. Several times last night I thought him very haughty and disagreeable.’

‘Well, Ellie, I did not see it. Perhaps you had stroked him the wrong way, as Nurse complains that Harry does to pussy; and oh, by the way, I have a scold in store for Dr. Blackburn, the first time I see him. Shabby! only to ask me for the Lancers, and never to come near me again, when I expected a waltz at least.’

I was rather alarmed at the mention of Dr. Blackburn, fearing some home-thrust to myself; but May was never very quick-sighted in that respect, and seemed to have noticed nothing—not even the sudden blush of which I was deeply conscious at that moment. Harriet would have read me at once, though she might have said nothing: probably she had already—I did not know.

Marianne was no better than Nurse at keeping anything to herself; and, when I got down-stairs a few minutes afterwards, I found her in the midst of a detailed account to mama of the party, even including Mr. Scott’s *devoirs* to Harriet, and her own conviction, and everybody else’s, that he was really in earnest.

‘Oh no, no!’ cried mama, with unwonted energy for her—her work actually falling from her hands as she looked up (such an idea had evidently never before occurred to her). ‘I *hope* not. Mr. Scott would in every respect be a most undesirable husband for Harriet. We could never sanction such a thing—never!’

‘Never sanction what, mama?’ asked a voice which startled

us all, while Marianne's face became scarlet. I suppose we had been talking so earnestly that we had not heard her come in; but there stood Harriet, her heightened colour and slightly defiant look showing that she had heard every word.

Mama was silent. What could she say? At that moment the discussion did seem rather premature. Very likely Harriet had never taken such an idea into her head, and how could she be warned against him? It was rather awkward.

'Marianne is afraid your head will be turned with Mr. Scott's attentions last night, that's all,' I said, laughing, as no one else seemed disposed to speak.

Harriet tossed her head scornfully.

'Mr. Scott's attentions! Most likely, if she were to go to Colston Hill to-night she would find his "attentions" bestowed on Miss Elphinstone, or any other young lady he happened to fancy at the moment. And mama was actually forbidding the banns! Well, really, mama, I thought you had known Marianne by this time. Ridiculous!' and she laughed contemptuously.

Mama seemed quite reassured.

'Marianne, my dear,' she said, turning to her, 'you must really take care what you say,—you know papa would be dreadfully annoyed if he ever heard a hint of such a thing.'

'I should say so,' interrupted Harriet; 'and so would Mr. Scott,—and so would I. It is fortunate for you, Marianne, that Charlie has no imagination;' and she quitted the room, evidently ruffled in no small degree.

Marianne seemed hurt—no wonder; she told me afterwards that, although she lived a hundred years, she would never interfere with Harriet's affairs again,—she did not understand her. I rather thought *I* did; however, I was not sure; and, after all, it was no business of mine,—at all events, it was not a subject for discussion, and we turned the conversation. But while Marianne was expatiating on Lady Charlotte's Brussels lace and Lady Maitland's diamonds, I congratulated myself, as I drank my coffee, that she had no suspicions of me to communicate, as I could not have borne either the revela-

tion or the admonitions which mama would probably have given me.

After breakfast, Marianne strolled into the garden with Harry, to gather bouquets for the hospital, and I went up-stairs to get some work which mama wished finished. Nurse soon followed me to my room, ostensibly to inquire how I had enjoyed the party, but really to fulfil my predictions of last night, and favour me with a fuller account of her own experiences.

'Eh, Miss Heelen,' she said, after sundry details not requisite for this history, 'do ye ken, Mr. Frew says the gentlemen last nicht were a' sayin' Miss Harrit was the bonniest in the room; an' that there was nae doot wha wad be leddy o' Dalmany sune.'

'Frew talks a great deal of nonsense,' said I rather shortly, remembering the conversation that had just passed in the parlour; 'you should have had more sense than to encourage him, Nurse.'

'Na, he kens fine what he's sayin',' continued Nurse, unheeding the rebuff; 'an' there's mair says't nor him. Ye'll no' lichtlie Mr. Morton's word, Miss Heelen, surely? he's like to ken, gin onybody does.'

'Mr. Morton!' I repeated in astonishment. 'What does he know about it?'

'He maun ken something, Miss Heelen, for he said to Mr. Bell, the schoolmaster, that it bid to be. (Mr. Bell tell't Robbie Gourlay, an' Robbie tell't me.) An' mair nor that, he said a'budy wad be pleased at it. He askit Mr. Bell if he had heard tell o't, an' he hadna.'

'I should rather think not. Mr. Morton must be better informed than anybody else (than I am, at least), if he knows all that.'

I began now to understand Nurse's drift: she had been hearing reports, and was hurt that she had not been confided in. I reassured her on that point. The contradiction to her firmly cherished belief, however, was not at all to her gratification.

'I'm sure,' she said regretfully, 'I'm vexed to hear it's no'

that far forrit yet ; I dinna see, for ma pairt, what for they're sae lang about it. The Laird'll no' get the like o' Miss Harrit far or near ; an', 'deed, she wad gang a gey bit or she got ane like him. His comin' doon here's just been a God's blessin',' continued Nurse, who was a regular worshipper of the rising sun ; 'he's garred Morton draw in his hand quick enough : Robbie Gourlay heard him gettin' a gey flytin' on the road ae day, an' he's been a heap better since syne. Ye see, a'body's the better o' bein' lookit after, Miss Heelen.'

Here Nurse was called away, and I, at last in blissful solitude, began to unfold my work,—the scenes of last night passing in review before me, and the sounds ringing in my ears. All at once, work, thimble, and scissors—all I had taken up—dropped from my hands, which were clasped over my burning face, as the remembrance rushed upon me of my conduct at supper. Somehow I had not thought of it last night. Could he have seen it ? There was, after all, some comfort in the doubt. But, if he had, what *would* he think of me ? Could I ever, ever, look him in the face again ?

I was still on the floor, where I had dropped, my hands still clasped over my face, in an agony of blushing, when the door-bell rang, and I had just time to start up, when Betsy came to the door to announce Miss Fanny Craufurd. 'Come to gossip over the party, no doubt,' thought I, with, at that moment, something of Tom's bitterness against 'idle girls.' Fanny was my own special companion, and I had no excuse for not appearing to her. But I am afraid I must have seemed a most uninteresting companion, as I scarcely heard a word of her prattle about the gentlemen, the rooms, and the dresses ; and did I see Mr.—? and Lord——? and Lady Charlotte's magnificent betrothal ring ? etc.

At last she went, and I was released. On going down to mama again, I found her lamenting the sudden end of some shades of wool, which she required for a sofa-blanket she was working for the bazaar ; and, glad of an excuse for a walk, I volunteered to go across to the village to get them matched. When I had on my hat, and was going away, Tom came from

his 'den' for his lunch, and, seeing me go out, he asked if I would mind going on to Colmuir End to inquire for one of his boys who was ill, as he had not time to go himself. I agreed, and proceeded on my way. The fresh air revived me; and, having successfully matched the wools, and made the desired inquiry at Colmuir End, I had turned my steps homewards, when, in turning a corner of the road, my heart nearly bounded to my mouth, for there, not many yards distant, and walking at a pace most unlike *his* usual rapid step, was Dr. Blackburn.

He did not seem to have recovered his illness of the night before, whatever it might have been, as never since I knew him had he looked so exceedingly pale and jaded. It almost seemed to me (though surely it must have been fancy only) that when he first saw me he would have turned off in an opposite direction; but I had seen him, and he must come on; and it seemed to me that his paleness increased as he did so. Fortunately I had my hat pulled down, so that I hoped he did not see my face as he approached. Usually he had some pleasant word always ready to greet his friends, but this was wanting now; and the hand that took mine trembled like an aspen-leaf. I was the first to speak.

'You have not recovered your illness, Dr. Blackburn,' I said, my own agitation vanishing at the sight of his.

He made no direct reply.

'It is very cold to-day,' said he, shivering.

Alas! the cold was in his own frame only. It was a summer afternoon—the sun not shining, certainly, but the sky beautifully blue, and the air balmy sweet, and yet he complained of cold!

'You are very wrong, Dr. Blackburn,' I said, while he still held my hand, and made no attempt to move on. 'Can you not prescribe for yourself?—or consult some one?'

He shook his head with a forced smile.

'There are some maladies, Miss Helen, that defy even the doctor. Mine, I suspect, is one.'

'What can you mean, Dr. Blackburn?' cried I, in terror,

all kinds of wild surmises rushing into my mind. 'Something is the matter. What is it?'

'Do not ask me,' he said, with an imploring gesture, quitting my hand, and turning with me, after a moment's seeming hesitation.

I felt extremely at a loss what to do, as he showed no inclination to speak, and I of course could not—and we walked on in silence.

'Has anything painful occurred since last night, Dr. Blackburn?' ventured I at length, looking up at him anxiously. I was not prepared for what followed. He had been abstractedly stripping the leaves off a little twig he had pulled from the hedge as we passed. He now flung it from him, and turned impetuously to me.

'Only that I have been mad,' he said, in low excited tones, while I gazed at him in consternation. 'I had dreamed a dream of bliss, and have had a terrible awaking.'

What could he mean?

'Helen,' said he, stopping suddenly, taking both my hands, and looking at me with a strange tenderness, 'I had thought that you and I might at least have been friends; but I see it cannot be.'

Bewildered and alarmed at this strange address, what could I say? He did not give me time to say anything.

'I know you would have been a friend,—as a sister might,' he went on, in the same agitated, hurried tone. 'Even that would have been happiness; but, Helen, it might have become *too* bright for me. I must not, dare not, trust myself to enjoy it.'

He still held my hand, looking at me as if he were indeed taking a last farewell; but I could not have spoken then to save my life. He paused a moment, more, as it seemed, in troubled thought than in any expectation of my speaking. What, indeed, could I have said?

'Helen,' he resumed for the third time, calling me by my name (how strangely it thrilled me!), 'before we part, say that you will forgive me for anything you may have thought

—or may come to think—unjustifiable in my conduct towards you. Judge me as leniently as you can. If you knew all, you would pity rather than blame me.'

A pang shot through my heart. Could it be that he was going away—to leave me? My eyes filled with tears at the thought. I could not raise them, lest he should see—till he spoke again.

'Do you promise?' he asked, in a low whispered tone, as he bent to catch my reply.

'Yes, yes,' I said, as well as my tears would let me,—'anything you wish.'

He wrung my hands as if to part. I must have lost my senses altogether, for I kept hold of his, and sobbed out, almost inarticulately, 'You are not going away—to leave us?'

'No, no,' he cried hastily. He seemed about to add more, but stopped short. 'God bless you!' he exclaimed abruptly. 'May He bless you, and make you happy;' and, with another convulsive pressure of my hands, he plunged into a by-path which led to Colmuir End, and was lost to sight.

I remained standing for a few minutes where he had left me, trying to collect my scattered thoughts, which were in a whirlpool, and in which every now and again came up the one tangible question—'What could he mean?' *That* was distinct; but the answer—and all the rest—maze and confusion. He was not going away; and he said he was not ill. What strange calamity had then befallen him? and how was I connected with it? If it were a secret, why could he not tell me? He had trusted me before, and I had been faithful, and why not now? But I could not stand there, and, in no mood to encounter any one, I got over a stile close at hand into the Dalmany woods, meaning to return homewards by the little by-path at the water-side.

I had not taken many steps when I came upon a figure, seated on a rustic bench close by, shaded by the luxuriant foliage of a spreading oak, and fast asleep. It was the factor, Mr. Morton. His hat was off, and a knife lay open beside

him, with which he seemed to have been notching the trees, probably for the forester's benefit. How long had he been there, I wondered? Surely he could not have overheard our conversation?—but, after all, granting that he had, what could he have made of it? And, reassured as to that, I thought no more about it, and walked on. Though fifty Mr. Mortons had heard us, what cared I? I had done nothing; and if he had made anything of Dr. Blackburn's speeches, it was more than I had.

Still, however, my heart was sad enough. The gates of Eden, which last night had stood open, almost inviting me to enter, now seemed closed against me—every aperture even was carefully barred. One glimpse I had got of its verdant bowers and flowery meads; but to sit in their shade and gather of their sweets was not permitted me. I stood without. Behind lay the pathway I had trodden, but I could not go back upon it; before lay a waste of sand, dry, arid, and burning, with scarcely a green spot in its wide expanse where I might stay my weary feet, and rest, and be refreshed; yet I must brace myself, and take my staff in my hand, and travel on. No one must see my fainting. I was not the only one shut out of Eden, and I repeated to myself the words of my favourite hymn,—‘Thy way, not mine, O Lord.’ But even then, in forming this resolve, I broke down, and, leaning against the trunk of an old tree, I cried as I had never done before. Suddenly, however, as in times like these, things will flash across one that change the whole current of our thoughts, I called to mind the word he had used,—‘Sister,’—as well as the previous ones, that ‘he had had a terrible awaking,’ and I saw it all. He *had* loved Harriet, and last night had opened his eyes to the fact that there was no hope for him. Then, then, my Eden was worse than lost to me—*it had never been*. What must he have thought of me?—even of my tears a few minutes before? The thought was unendurable, and I sprang up, resolved that I would never, never look him in the face again; and if I must come in contact with him, at least I was sure I could never speak to him. If he had not thought of me,



certainly I would not think of him. Then I dipped my handkerchief in the little stream, and bathed my tear-stained face. My visions were gone, it was true, and the world seemed less bright, but I was no longer weak, and, gathering myself up, I steadily pursued my way.

I was not sorry to find, on reaching home, that dinner was nearly over, so that I could escape to my own room without observation; and when Nurse came in shortly afterwards with my dinner, I must have looked much as usual, as she noticed nothing amiss. She told me, with a triumphant air, that Mr. Scott had called soon after I went out, leaving his card 'for the young ladies;' also Mr. Farquharson and Captain Craufurd; but she did not seem to set so much store on them.

I could eat no dinner; but when Marianne came dancing into the room a minute or two afterwards, asking for the wools, and where I had been, I was nearly myself again. All the evening I worked busily, to keep myself from thinking, and talked and laughed with the others; and even if Mr. Morton had walked in and told them he had seen me crying in the wood, no longer ago than that very afternoon, sure am I that they would not have believed him. So often are our deepest feelings unguessed at, even by our nearest friends!

Next day, in church, true to my resolve, I never lifted my head; for Dr. Blackburn's pew was opposite, and I knew he was there. But the school was yet to come, and I kept wondering how he would meet me with Harriet there, after all his half revelations of the day before, and how I would manage to speak to him. I need not have troubled myself on the subject, as he never came near me.

We went in rather later than usual, during the singing of the hymn, and, but for the very perceptible quiver in his voice, as we passed without looking up, I might have imagined that he had not seen us. I thought he would surely come and speak to us at the end, but he did not, and, for the first time since I had joined the school, we went home alone.

‘What can have come over the Doctor?’ said Harriet, as we were going along the bridge. ‘He is not like himself at all to-night.’

How could she manage to say it so coolly?—surely she must have known;—was she totally without a heart?

‘I don’t know,’ I said, as coolly as I could. ‘I did not see him at all to-night; he never came near me.’

‘Oh, he spoke to me,’ said Harriet indifferently, ‘but only once. He seemed to be in a strange kind of mood.’

Well, I was sorry for him! She evidently cared not a pin what he felt; but I *wondered* at her—I had never ceased wondering how she could prefer Mr. Scott. But, as I said before, tastes differ.

Monday we were engaged to spend with our cousins; and, notwithstanding thoughts which now and then would intrude in spite of myself, it was a pleasant day; only, as nothing particular occurred to mark it out from other days, I would not have mentioned it here but for the consequences which it entailed. The day had been uncommonly warm, but a thick rain, and, indeed, mist, had come on in the evening, after we had left the farmhouse on our way home; and, not being wrapped up for it, I caught a severe cold and sore throat, which, however, I thought nothing of at first, but the next day it had increased, and mama made me stay in bed. If that had been all, I would have submitted most willingly, but an unpleasant surprise awaited me.

I was lying half asleep, and comfortably enough, about noon, when mama came into my room to say that she had thought it as well to send for the Doctor to come and see me, and that he was now waiting in the drawing-room.

The Doctor! Dr. Blackburn!—sent for to see me!—*me!*—whom he had thought it necessary to ‘cut’ only three days before. It was unbearable! I was too indignant to speak; and mama, I suppose taking it for granted that I was acquiescent, left the room to bring him. I was desperate. See Dr. Blackburn I could not, and, what was more, I would not; and, springing out of bed on the impulse of the moment, I shut the

door, and locked it. Presently I heard them arrive at the door, and the handle turned.

‘How is this?’ said mama’s gentle voice. ‘The door seems locked. Marianne! Nurse!’ she called, ‘will you open the door? Here is the Doctor.’

I could think of nothing to say, and so was silent; but, the attempts on the door being repeated, I was obliged to answer.

‘Oh, don’t come in, please,’ I cried imploringly; ‘there is nothing the matter with me.’

There was another gentle remonstrance from mama; and then I heard another voice, whose every tone thrilled to my heart.

‘Oh, Mrs. Fitz-James, we had better not go in, if she does not wish it; it might only make her worse. I will look in again in the evening;’ and I heard him go down-stairs.

I got out of bed, watched him safely out, and then, but not till then, I unlocked the door, and went back to bed, to await mama’s censure, which I knew would not be very heavy. I was not mistaken—a few mild reproofs were all I got; but Harriet and Marianne, who came into the room shortly after she went away, were a more serious matter—Harriet especially, as Marianne always said out what she thought, whatever it might be, and I could combat it or not as I pleased; but Harriet thought, and said nothing.

‘Oh, Ellic,’ said Marianne, ‘the Doctor was dreadfully angry! his very lips were white when he went out! It was really too bad of you to bring him over for nothing, and he seemed to be in such a hurry, too.’

‘I did not bring him over,’ I said. ‘I didn’t want him at all. I hate young doctors.’

‘That’s right, Ellic,’ said Harriet provokingly. ‘They’re odious creatures, every one of them, especially Dr. Blackburn.’

I wondered what she thought,—but I might wonder long enough.

The evening came, bringing not the Doctor, but Jenny, who, not content with Nurse’s report, demanded admittance to my

chamber, that she might 'see for hersel' how I was. The excitement of the day, and the reflections consequent thereupon, had thrown me into a kind of fever, so that when Jenny, who was half a doctor herself, took my hand, she pronounced me in a high fever, and that I 'maun hae the Doctor.'

'No, no, Jenny,' said I hastily; 'I don't like doctors; I wouldn't see him—unless I was a great deal worse than I am.'

Jenny tried in vain to combat my resolution, but finding it fruitless she departed, promising to repeat her visit next day, which she did accordingly, bringing her master's compliments and inquiries; but he himself came not, whatever might be the reason. Whether, as mama and Marianne alleged, he had felt insulted by my conduct, or whether it was something else, I did not know.

By Thursday I was well enough to be up as usual, and, as the weather was sufficiently fine, I went out at the same time. I was anxious to be strong and well, so as not to postpone the visit to Westermuir; and Marianne and I went to take a little stroll by the water-side. It was delicious to breathe the fresh and flower-scented air again, after my two days in bed, and we strolled on rather too far for my still half-invalid state, and were obliged to sit down, for a minute or so, on two large stones, which stood conveniently in our way. It was a pleasant but cool day, and Marianne had just proposed our return to the house, when we saw the Doctor passing on the bank above. On seeing us he came hurriedly down. I blushed vividly now, at the remembrance of my escapade.

'There's the Doctor coming,' said Marianne. 'He looks cross yet, I declare.' He certainly did at that moment. Lifting his hat as he approached,—

'Is it possible, Miss Marianne,' he began, without any other greeting, 'that you are allowing your sister to be out on such a day?—and sitting too.'

He looked at me as he spoke, but never took my hand.

'But Ellie was tired, Doctor,' said Marianne, 'and we were obliged to sit down.'

'Then give her your arm home; but let there be no sitting,'

said he shortly ; ' she might catch her death,—preposterous ! ' and, lifting his hat again, he hurried away. He had never spoken to me.

' Well, I do think,' said poor Marianne, as she complied with his orders as quickly as she could, ' I never saw Dr. Blackburn's temper before. It must all be on account of your conduct to him, Ellie. You saw he did not speak to you.'

Ay, I saw that, but I did not think it was for that reason. I could not bear to speak of him ; and I was glad when she began to talk of the intended journey, and other things far away. How little sunshine the day had for me now !

' I hope you will be quite strong to-morrow, Ellie dear,' she said, as we went into the house, ' else I shall not go.'

' Oh, I am sure I shall,' I said ; ' I'm quite well now.'





## CHAPTER XIV.

### AN UNEXPECTED EVENT.

‘There cam’ a braw wooer  
Adoon the lang glen.’



RIDAY found me strong and well, and, as there was now no reason for delay, the Westermuir party departed.

‘Take care of yourself and Ellie,’ said mama to Harriet, kissing her as she said good-bye, ‘and write every day.’

And Marianne’s parting injunction to me was equally characteristic.

‘Be sure to make your peace with the Doctor,’ whispered she, embracing me ; ‘and give my compliments to Mr. Scott, if you see him.’

*If I saw him !*

A journey to Westermuir, away among the moors as it is, was, and still is, rather a formidable affair ; as, even yet, there is no railway within many miles of it, and the roads round about, without exception, are shamefully bad. The party was to be away three weeks ; and, somewhat depressed at any rate, I looked forward with some dread to the prospect of spending them alone ; but with aunt so near, and plenty of occupation, I thought we might contrive to pass the time tolerably at least. I would do my best.

The first fortnight passed very quietly, without anything particular to mark the lapse of time, at least for me. I went very often to aunt’s, sometimes spending the whole day there, and only returning home at night ; and my cousins and I saw

each other every day, and it was wonderful how quickly the time passed. We heard every morning either from mama or Marianne, and we both wrote as regularly to them at night. My inward wound was by no means healed, but at least it no longer bled, and the mere determination to bear it bravely, and as a trial appointed for me by One who knows what is best for each of us, served in no small degree to deaden the sense of pain. I worked hard at my fire-screen (Sir Walter Scott sitting in his study, with his dogs at his feet), which required great patience and close attention ; besides practising some very intricate classical music I had brought from London, and finishing some little sketches I had taken since coming home—of the old Castle, 'The Poet's Bower,' 'Habbie's Howe,' etc.—intended for the bazaar ; and I strove to take an interest in these. I filled every hour of every day with occupation, giving myself no leisure for looking back, and I think the discipline did me good. Harriet, too, though she gave me little of her company during the day, was always at home in the evening ; and when we used to sit talking over our tea or our work—either in the Manse, or at aunt's, or good Miss Smythe's—I would forget my depression altogether, and feel almost happy for the time being.

The Doctor and I had met but three times,—twice on Sabbaths, when we had merely shaken hands at the school ; and once when he was leaving the hospital, when he passed me hurriedly with a bow. Mr. Scott I had never seen since the party at Sir John's, except at the church-door, when we had merely exchanged words. But I was very sure that Harriet saw him much oftener than that, although she did not inform me. Of course, his calling at the Manse was out of the question at present ; but, as she went out to walk every day,—never asking me to accompany her, or joining our cousins,—she had abundant opportunities of doing so. I heard, indeed, from Nurse, that this was the case, and that he had twice accompanied her to the door in the most open manner, rung the bell for her, and gone away ; but I had not myself seen him, and Harriet never mentioned the circumstance to me.

And so the days went on, until the Friday which completed the fortnight since the departure of the travellers.

It is said that 'Coming events cast their shadows before them;' but it was never so with me. Either I was an exception to the ordinary lot, or I was too stupid to see far before me; but certain it is that all the greatest events in my life have come to me without the smallest premonition on my part, and the day in question was no exception.

Harriet and I were sitting in the parlour after our two-o'clock dinner, when we were startled by the sound of wheels crunching along the gravelled approach, and drawing up before the door.

'Can that be Lady Maitland?' said Harriet, going to the window and glancing out; but immediately, and without a word, she turned and came back to the table, and seemed to wait.

Presently Betsy entered with a note for Harriet, and to say that Mrs. Muir, Admiral Scott's housekeeper, waited in the study. Harriet held out her hand for the note, and changed colour visibly at sight of the handwriting. Then she rose hurriedly, trembling all the while, put the note carefully in her pocket, and quitted the room. Five minutes afterwards she reappeared in her hat and jacket.

'The Admiral is very ill, Ellie,' she said, thinking, I suppose, that some sort of explanation was due to me. 'He thinks himself dying, and wishes to see me.'

'What for?' escaped from my lips in amazement.

'I don't know,' she returned briefly, and again left the room, and in a few minutes I heard the carriage drive away.

The housekeeper was an extremely respectable person, a member of Colston Church, and I knew mama could have had no objections to Harriet's going with her, but still I felt strangely excited, and dim presentiments of I knew not what filled my mind. I could settle to nothing. I was sorry to think the Admiral was ill, poor old man; but what *could* he want with Harriet? I was sure the note must have been from Mr. Scott, otherwise I thought she would have shown it to



me. Had it been Marianne, I would have heard everything without requiring to ask, but Harriet had always been more reserved, and of late a barrier seemed gradually to have arisen between us which I could not pass. But that might have been partly my own fault; my conscience told me that I was not altogether blameless.

All Nurse's gossip of the week, which I had scarcely attended to before, now also rose before me. How 'the haill toon threepit wi' her that the Laird wadna be lang o' askin' Miss Harriet, if he hadna dune't a'ready.' And I earnestly debated with myself whether I had done right in not imparting to mama, long ago, my conviction that there was more between them than mere flirtation. So much had happened to myself in that time, that I had not thought of Harriet as I would have done some months ago, and it might be too late now. I wished they were all safe home again; but, at any rate, a few days would bring them now, and surely nothing could happen ere then? Then I wondered if I had not been selfish in being so much taken up with my own feelings as to forget my sister. But there was no use in bewailing the past. It, with all the thoughts, and words, and actions that belonged to it, had gone for ever; but the present and the future were still with me, let me improve them while I could. I thought she would be cold and hungry when she came home, so I had a fire lighted and tea infused, to cheer her. But the fire had been twice replenished, and the afternoon had waned into evening, and the evening was far advanced, ere she came.

The church-clock was chiming nine when the carriage once more drove up the avenue. I ran to the door. The man was letting down the steps; but, to my astonishment, it was not the housekeeper, but Mr. Scott who now alighted and handed out Harriet. Her face was deeply flushed, which in itself was rather an uncommon circumstance (as, whatever her inward feelings might be, she seldom allowed them to appear), and she did not lift her eyes as she advanced. Mr. Scott was a sight I had not expected to see, and I had almost run back again. I thought, too, he seemed rather taken aback at sight

of me ; but he came forward instantly and shook hands, while Harriet walked slowly up the steps.

‘How is the Admiral?’ I asked eagerly.

‘He is very ill,’ was the reply. His face was grave as he spoke ; yet there was a light in his eye, and an undefined something in his manner which was certainly not sadness. It was strange ! Why, even Harriet seemed to feel it more, who was scarcely a friend, much less a relation. But I had given up trying to account for people’s inconsistencies.

I would have made some further inquiry, but Harriet had now entered the house ; and I suppose Mr. Scott thought she had forgotten to bid him good-night, as he abruptly passed me and hastened after her. He took her hand, and said something to her in a low tone which I did not hear ; then he came out hastily, lifted his hat to me, and threw himself into the carriage, which once more rolled away.

I watched it vanish down the drive, reappear in the distance, and then vanish altogether, before I turned into the house. Really, Mr. Scott and Harriet did seem on most intimate terms ! It was natural enough his escorting her home—a young lady who had gone to see his dying relative at that relative’s express desire. But what on earth had she gone for ? Surely the Admiral had lady relatives enough about him without requiring Harriet ? Unless (it suddenly flashed upon me) he had heard reports about his nephew and her, and wished to inquire as to their truth. The whole thing was inexplicable. Perhaps Harriet would enlighten me ; but I had doubts of that, especially if it were connected with herself.

I waited impatiently for her to appear, but she lingered so long taking off her things, that at last I went to seek her. Her door was locked, but she opened it at once when I knocked.

‘What is it, Ellie?’ she said.

‘Won’t you come to tea?’ I asked.

‘Tea!’ she exclaimed, with a bewildered air ; ‘have you not had tea yet?’

‘I waited for you,’ I said. She passed her arm round me without a word, and we went down together.

'What a cheerful fire!' she exclaimed, on entering the room.

'I thought you would be chill after your drive; and I am sure you must be hungry—I know I am; but I daresay you have had something by this time.'

'No,' she said, in a dreamy kind of tone; 'I wished nothing.' She sat down at the table, and I gave her some tea, which she drank eagerly, and asked for another cup; but the bit of toast she had taken on her plate and crumbled to pieces remained untouched. I glanced at her. Her face was still flushed. Her eyes, always bright, had now a kind of excitement in them which I could not understand; and when I handed her the cup of tea I started, for her hand was like a burning coal. Somehow a feeling of constraint came over me, and I could not ask the question that hovered on my lips. If Marianne had been here, she would at once, and without scruple, have put it. How easy some people make the road that is so difficult to others!

Harriet must have seen my constraint, but she said nothing. Perhaps the secret was not hers to tell me. At last, with an effort, I brought out,—

'Is Lady Elphinstone at Hainslie?'

'She was there, I believe, in the morning, and will be again to-morrow.'

'Is he so very ill?'

A peculiar expression flitted across her face as she answered,—

'He thinks himself dying,—although Dr. Blackburn says he may rally.'

Dr. Blackburn! he was the doctor; I had forgotten that! Was it possible that Harriet's visit had any connection with him? and the half-forgotten mystery, together with the other circumstances of that first day, to which the Admiral had been a witness, darted now across my mind. I would have asked if she had spoken to Dr. Blackburn, but I could not bring myself to pronounce his name, and we sat silent. Whatever had been the cause of her visit, she evidently was not disposed to communicate it. I tried again.

‘Mr. Scott did not seem to be so greatly cast down about his uncle as I would have thought.’

She started at the name, and lifted her eyes suddenly to mine, as if she thought I had some hidden meaning in the words.

‘I told you the Doctor thought he might rally; at least he hopes so,’ said she, in a constrained voice.

There was no more to be said. Evidently I was not to be told the object of her visit. I tried to talk of other things, and at first she roused herself to reply, but by and by her answers became slower and shorter, till at last they died away altogether.

‘You surely have not finished already, Harriet?’ said I, as she pushed her chair away from the table, and stood for a moment by the fire.

She did not seem to hear me at first,—then she started and looked up suddenly, as if my words had reached her in a dream.

‘Did you speak, Ellie? Oh yes, thank you, I have finished—it was very nice;’ and then she slowly left the room.

I heard her ascend the stairs, go into her room, and lock the door. We two were together, and yet how far asunder!

I could not solve the mystery by myself, that was very certain; and, worn out at last, I gave up trying. I only hoped that Nurse would not get hold of it, as she was out that day, having done a rare thing for her,—taken a holiday to go into Edinburgh to visit a friend.

I sat long over the solitary tea-table, till the shades of night had gathered. I heard Harriet moving about in her room, but she never came near me; and when at last I went to my not less solitary chamber, the silence between us remained unbroken.

The morning came like a benignant fairy, bringing with it brighter thoughts. Harriet seemed to feel its renovating influence also, for she appeared at breakfast with more than her usual gay spirits, and we had a most pleasant meal, the events of last night being tacitly avoided by both of us. The post

brought two letters—one for Harriet, which she put in her pocket without reading, the other from Marianne to me.

‘What does Marianne say, Ellie?’ asked Harriet, when I had read it. ‘When are they coming home?’

‘They are to be in Edinburgh on Friday morning,’ said I, handing her the letter. ‘I think we will go in and meet them,’ I added eagerly, after she laid it down again. ‘You have not been in Edinburgh for so long.’

Again that peculiar look I had noticed last night.

‘We’ll see, Ellie,’ said she quietly; but that was all.

The day passed much as usual. Harriet, for a wonder, did not go out, but divided her time between her own room and the garden,—out and in, out and in, out and in,—settling to nothing long; and even the pretty hand-screens she had been so interested in the day before were not once taken up, nor the piano opened. To-day I felt in better spirits than I had done for some weeks. For a little, at least, the clouds had drifted, and a gleam of sunshine appeared, and I enjoyed it to the full. No one called, bright and lovely as the day was,—not even Lizzie; but it was by no means a dull day for either of us.

After tea I went to the study to write to Marianne and Louisa Maitland, which must have occupied me longer than I was aware of, as the daylight had long faded before I had finished. I was in a hurry for the post, and, instead of ringing for candles, I ran up-stairs to the drawing-room for a taper to seal my letters.

Opening the door hurriedly, I was rushing into the room, when I drew back petrified. There stood Mr. Scott in the middle of the room, in the act, it seemed to me, of taking his departure. His back was to the door, and his arm was round Harriet,—his face bent down to hers, kissing—not her hand this time, but—her lips! The door had opened so suddenly that she had had no time to draw away. I saw them distinctly, so that there could be no mistake. Harriet started away to the window as if she had been shot. I remained speechless, confronting Mr. Scott, who stood coolly before me

as if he had done no wrong,—only for one moment though ; the next he came forward, and, before I was aware of his intention, threw his arm round me, laughingly kissed me also, and walked out of the room, ushering himself down-stairs.

‘What does Mr. Scott mean by this conduct?’ said I indignantly, when I had collected myself. ‘It is the greatest insult I ever received in my life !’

Harriet still stood in the window, to all appearance violently agitated. I thought at first she was crying, but I soon saw she was laughing—at me, no doubt !

‘What does he mean by it?’ I repeated. ‘He can’t be in his sober senses, surely ?’

‘For kissing you, Ellie?’ asked Harriet with some effort, still laughing.

‘And for kissing you,’ I said, with marked emphasis. ‘I can believe everything now that is said against him. What would he not do, when he can behave in that ungentlemanly manner ?—and his uncle dying, too ! And what is he doing here at all,’ I continued, ‘when mama and papa are away ?’

Harriet made no answer.

‘I have never spoken all this time,’ I went on, gaining courage ; ‘but, Harriet, you know as well as I that papa and mama would not approve of your walks with Mr. Scott. But to-night is beyond everything ! and he shall never, never enter the house again, if I can help it !—at any rate till they come back.’

Harriet was leaving the room as I spoke, but she turned at this, and looked at me so strangely !—not as if she were challenging my right to remonstrate, but somehow as if I would change my mind.

‘Unless,’ I said, as a thought struck me, ‘unless,—can it be possible, Harriet, that you have engaged yourself to Mr. Scott ? What will papa say ?’

I know not how I said it. Perhaps, astonished as I felt, my words were warmer than I intended, or than they ought to have been. She drew herself proudly up, and her eyes flashed defiance.

‘Really, Ellie, I see no right you have to question me in that manner—assuming the elder sister over me. Dr. Blackburn and you no doubt give your confidence to all the world. I suppose you think that I am blind ;’ and she swept out of the room without another word.

I would not have inflicted on Harriet the pang these words gave me for the deepest wrong she could have done me. She did know it, then ! not only her own power over Dr. Blackburn, but also, it would seem, the feelings I had been madly cherishing towards him, and my agonized awaking. Could she know of the interview also ? *He* never told her, I was sure. Of course I knew that it was for her sake he seemed to have renounced our friendship, and she must have known it too ; but, if he had read my feelings, he never would have betrayed them. I would have staked my life on that. But as to any ‘confidence’ between us—what could I have said ? I had nothing tangible to impart. I exonerated myself completely there ; but I did feel hurt that, knowing all she had implied, she could have spoken to me as she did. If Marianne had been at home at that moment, I must have leaned my weary head against her loving breast, and poured out all my thoughts and feelings in a passionate flood of tears. Her gentle sympathy and soothing would have been a healing balm. But she was far away.

I was sorry the harmony between Harriet and me had again been broken ; but I did not see that I could have acted otherwise than I had done ; and, as I again spent a solitary evening—how weary and desolate it seemed !—I had only this for my consolation.

‘The Sabbath dawned no day of rest’ to me. I was not surprised, on going down to prayers, to find that Harriet had not yet come down, as I had heard no movements in her room ; and besides, she was never at any time famous for early rising. But when my breakfast was nearly over, Nurse appeared, to say that ‘Miss Harrit had a heidache and couldna rise, and her breakfast was to be ta’en up till her.’ My conscience checked me for never having gone near her all last

night or this morning, and everything else was forgotten at the moment. 'I will take it up myself, Nurse,' I said, and presently I was carrying up the tray with her breakfast.

'I am sorry you have a headache, dear,' I said, kissing her, and smoothing her pillows; then, bringing a large shawl, I wrapped it round her, and gave her her breakfast.

'You are very kind, Ellie,' said she, with a strange gentleness. 'I don't deserve it.'

I thought she alluded to last night, and meant it as a tacit apology.

'Oh, we'll forget all that,' I said, as I kissed her again, and thought that no one could but be loving to such a face. Of course, as she was in bed, I did not think of going to church, which I regretted the less, perhaps, as the preacher who was to officiate for papa was not all that could be wished, I had heard. I had intended Nurse, however, to go as usual; but it seemed she had decided otherwise.

'She wasna gaun oot in the morning,' she said, 'when her bairn was ill in her bed, and her mama frae hame.'

I knew by experience that it was no use remonstrating with Nurse; so she had her own way.

I sat beside Harriet nearly all the morning, reading aloud, and only stopped when Nurse came to tell me that 'the gentleman who had been preaching was doon the stair.'

'Oh, I forgot, he had to come here to luncheon,' said Harriet, with an annoyed expression.

I thought to myself that it was I who ought to feel annoyed, —if any annoyance was in the case,—but I did not say so, and went down.

Mr. McCall was reclining on the sofa when I went in, boots and all, with a well-satisfied look on his countenance, as if he had been pleased with his efforts in the morning. He came forward, however, with great *empressement* to greet me.

'The Bride, I suppose?' said he, looking at me with a most extraordinary smile, and holding out his hand.

What did he call me? I looked at the man.

'I beg your pardon,' I said.



'Oh, it's sister,' said he, apparently enlightened, and retreated to his seat.

I sat down at the table, and invited him to have some luncheon, to supply deficiencies in conversation.

'Pa and ma from home to-day?' he said, as he drew his chair to the table, as close to mine as possible, and began an attack on the loaf. 'They'll be back in time for it though, I suppose. It's not the fashion to make a fuss about these things nowadays.'

'Most extraordinary unconnected talk this!' thought I; and, at a loss what to say, I asked him if he found it difficult to speak in Colston Church.

'Oh no,' he answered, in a self-satisfied tone; 'I always make a point of making myself at home wherever I am; and I must say pa's people are very good listeners.'

I responded warmly.

'Who's that fine young sprig sitting his lone in the front gallery, with the flunkies behind him?' asked he, after some rather lame attempts on my part at conversation. 'Rather a high chap, yon! but I must say he might attend better to the discourse.'

'I suppose you mean Mr. Scott of Dalmany,' said I, recognising the description; 'he generally sits there.'

'Oh! that's *him*, is it?' exclaimed he, in apparent astonishment; 'my word!—sister's fallen on her feet.'

I felt very considerably astonished. Could he have heard the village gossip already about Mr. Scott and Harriet? It was strange; and stranger still for him to allude to it,—a man we had never seen before! He did not think so himself, it was clear, as he went on, after a minute or two, during which I had tried in vain to start some other topics,—

'Is sister like you?' at the same time viewing me apparently with interest.

'I have two sisters,' said I coldly, for I did not choose to be interrogated in this manner.

'Oh, I mean the one that's to get Mr. Scott.'

This was the climax.

‘Mr. M‘Call,’ said I, rising, ‘whatever you may have heard, I am sure your own sense will show you that this is not a subject to be spoken of—especially to me. I am sorry you should have heard of it; but at least I beg of you that you will not mention it again to any one.’

It seemed his turn now to look astonished, and he did. ‘I’m sure,’ said he apologetically, ‘I never supposed it could be any offence to speak about a thing that everybody knows. Perhaps young ladies don’t like it; but if you don’t wish it, you know, I’ll not speak of it; and I’ll tell the beadle and precentor, when I go back, that you don’t want it spoken about.’

The beadle and precentor! were they and the minister gossiping in the vestry about such an affair? Was Harriet the town talk? It was really getting serious; I *must* speak to Harriet about it—only not to-day, when she was in bed. There was no use in saying any more to Mr. M‘Call; and, as he had apparently finished luncheon, I said to him that perhaps he might like to retire to the study for a little to look over his sermon,—an offer which he at once acceded to.

After he had gone back to church, I went up-stairs again to Harriet. She looked inquiringly at me as I entered the room,—with a somewhat strange scrutiny, as I afterwards remembered.

‘How did you get on with Mr. M‘Call, Ellie?’ asked she, taking the tea I had brought her.

‘Oh, he is the most extraordinary man I ever saw,’ said I; ‘you never heard such unconnected talk in your life. I don’t believe one sentence had any connection with the one that went before it. Well, I have seen a good many preachers in my life; but, to do them justice, never one like him. I wish Nurse were back to tell us what kind of a sermon he gave.’

Harriet, however, did not appear to take much interest in Mr. M‘Call, and seemed only glad to hear he was away.

She lay very quietly all the afternoon, while I prepared my lesson for the school; and about four o’clock, thinking she was asleep, I went down-stairs.

Not a sound fell on the stillness of the summer air. The

Sabbath peace was everywhere about, and the groups of eountry people I could see in the distance, returning homewards along the roads, formed a pleasing feature in the scene. I stood at the window for a good while, looking out, wondering why Nurse was so long in coming from church. It was not like her to stay gossiping with any one on Sabbath, whatever she might do on other days, more especially as Betsy also was out that day attending Strathie Church with her mother. At last I saw her, in a strange state of excitement, coming hurrying along.

‘What can be the matter now?’ thought I. ‘Can Mr. McCall have been showing any of his eccentricities in church?’—for I knew Nurse was particular in her ideas as to what ministers ought to be. But I was little prepared for the truth.

In she came, straight into the parlour, and, after making sure I was alone, shut the door carefully, while I looked at her in amazement, wondering what could be coming next. There was no mistaking her extreme excitement. Her head-gear, like Mause Headrigg’s of famous memory, had fallen back from her head; and while with one hand she grasped her Bible, carefully wrapped in her handkerchief, with the other she held on like a vice to the handle of the door, as if to prevent any intrusion till she had told her tale.

‘Miss Heelen,’ said she, looking at me with eyes nearly starting from their sockets, then bringing it all out in a burst, ‘did ye ken Miss Harrit was cried in the kirk the day?’

I sprang to my feet.

‘Cried in the kirk!’ I repeated, not taking in the meaning of the words for the moment; ‘you don’t mean proclaimed?’

‘Deed do I,’ cried she almost in a scream, ‘and wi’ the Laird! I wadna hae believed Anne Millar, for she whiles hears wrang; but Robbie Gourlay said it was true; an’ the precentor tell’t me he had read it oot wi’ his ain mooth. They wadna believe me that I didna ken.’

I sat down, shaking in every limb. I was not given to fainting, else I might have done it then, in the extremity of my surprise. As it was, I must have looked very pale, for

Nurse came forward and took me in her arms, as she used to do when I was a child.

‘My bairn,’ she said tenderly, ‘I thoct ye didna ken. To think that Miss Harrit’s ta’en us a’ in this way! I thoct there was something up when he cam’ last nicht, and bade sae lang, and gied me five golden sovrans, nae less.’

Yes! she had deceived us all most completely! And yet every straw that had turned up of late had pointed to this, if only I had but seen it. Even Mr. M‘Call’s conversation, not three hours ago, might have opened my eyes. Poor man! his unconnected talk was now sufficiently accounted for. How blind I had been! I would not say even to myself that her indisposition was feigned, but it seemed of a piece with the rest. What papa and mama would say was the next thought that came to me; but that was presently swallowed up in another. She had been proclaimed in their absence. When did she mean to be married? and what was the meaning of it all? But I must ask.

I ran up-stairs. They must intend to be married before papa’s return—that was clear and plain. Harriet! Harriet! But I must break the ice between us now.

Harriet was up, sitting in the window in her dressing-gown, when I went in. She must have known that I had heard it all; but she neither looked round nor spoke.

‘Harriet,’ I began, with desperate courage, and without giving myself time to think, ‘I have heard extraordinary news of you. Is it true?’

‘Is what true?’ she asked, turning round. Her face was pale, but resolute, and she had evidently determined to carry matters with a high hand. ‘How am I to know what you refer to, Ellie? But I won’t beat about the bush with you. It is true that Mr. Scott and I were proclaimed to-day, if that is what you ask; and we mean to be married to-morrow.’

The answer took away my breath. I dropped into a chair, and sat wondering for a moment if it were not all a dream; surely I *could not* be awake! But gradually the reality forced itself upon me; and, at the thought that she was indeed going

away from us and from her home for ever,—and going thus!— I fairly broke down, and burst into a violent fit of weeping.

My tears must have effected what my words could not, in breaking down all her defences, for she came and put her arms round me.

‘Ellie,’ she said, in a softened tone, ‘what is the use of grieving about it now?—and what is the use of grieving at all? I daresay every one will say I am a most fortunate girl;’ and she lifted her head proudly.

‘Papa and mama won’t say that, I fear,’ said I, rousing myself. ‘Do you remember what mama said the day after Lady Maitland’s party? that’—

‘Ellie,’ said she, interrupting me hastily, and laying her hand on my lips, ‘you must not say that to me now; whatever others may do, *I* believe nothing against him, and I will hear nothing.’

‘But why to-morrow?’ pleaded I; ‘why not wait at least till they come home?’

‘It is the Admiral’s dying request,’ she answered slowly, and still with a softened look and tone; ‘that was why I was sent for on Friday. He wishes to leave us married.’

There was nothing more to be said.

‘And do they know nothing of it at Westermuir?’ I asked breathlessly. ‘Is papa not to marry you?’

‘Now, Ellie, how can he? Mr. Scott wrote off yesterday, but of course it won’t reach him till to-morrow morning. We are to be married in the chapel at Dalmany; it is Mr. Scott’s church, you know—and Lady Elphinstone would rather have it there, at any rate’— She broke off in some confusion.

The chapel! Lady Elphinstone! Every one to know it but her own parents! What a slight to them!

‘Oh, Harriet! Harriet!’ I burst out, ‘it is very wrong; if you had wished them to know in time, an express could easily have been sent. You knew it on Friday night.’

‘It would have done no good, Ellie,’ she answered, still in a softened tone; ‘it could not have been delayed. We had given our word to the Admiral; poor old man, he is very ill!—it would kill him to be disappointed.’

‘Then he must think papa would object? and so must you?’ I still ventured to urge.

She quitted me and went back to the window, and her face took its former look of resolute defiance.

‘You had better send an express yourself this afternoon; there’s time yet for it to *arrive*, at least,’ she said, in a sarcastic tone. But I excused that; I did not, in fact, pay much attention to the words; my whole mind was in a turmoil; and, after a minute, without a word, I turned and left the room.

At the foot of the stairs I encountered Nurse, still highly excited, waiting to see ‘if it was really true.’

‘It is quite true,’ I said, and I could say nothing more, but, passing her abruptly, went into the parlour and shut the door. Up and down, up and down I walked,—it seemed impossible to sit,—thinking what was to be done. It was long past five, but I never thought of school; and as for dinner, it never entered my head. Neither, apparently, had it occurred to Nurse, as she never disturbed me. (Now that I think of it, she did put in her head once, asking something; but I must have made no response, as she withdrew it again immediately.)

Six o’clock passed. The hands of the timepiece pointed to seven; and I had neither sat down nor disentangled my thoughts in any way from their confusion. The first thing that roused me was Mr. Scott coming up to the door, and ringing the bell. He had a right to come now. I could say nothing against it, however perplexed or doubtful about him. The happy and successful lover he looked every inch! Oh, how I longed to rush out upon him, and have it out at once! tell him my opinion of his dishonourable conduct, and reproach him as he deserved! My next impulse, however, was to keep away from him—as far as possible out of his sight. Nothing I could have said would have moved him from his purpose, and I had better not interfere.

I heard him go up-stairs into the drawing-room, and Harriet go in almost immediately. Then I sat down. It was all up, then! Nothing could come between them now; and, waking up from the bewilderment of the last hour, I set myself to

look the matter steadily in the face, as I had not yet been able to do.

All at once a thought struck me, that, though I could not stop it, I could at least do something to show my parents that I at least had not forgotten them. Mr. Scott's letter, I calculated, could not possibly reach Westermuir till noon on Monday; but I could telegraph; and if it did not arrive in time to bring them, I, at least, would have no reflections. There was no office in Colston, but I could send to Edinburgh. Robbie, I knew, would go; and he was true as steel.

I darted up-stairs, rushed on my hat and jacket, came down noiselessly, and, making Nurse let me out by the back way, I ran over to the village. On the bridge I saw Dr. Blackburn—his duties in the school over—coming along on his way to his class; and, if my cheek flushed hotly, and my heart beat quicker at the sight of him, I did not slacken my speed, expecting that—as had been his usual of late—he would pass me with a hurried bow. He stopped, however.

‘What is the matter, Miss Helen?’ he asked. ‘You were not coming for my services, I hope?’

It was his own look and tone again, and he took my hand as he spoke. How quickly old feelings revived at the touch! Whatever had been the barrier that divided us, I felt I had my friend again; and the glad revulsion was almost too much for me at that moment. I tried to speak, or at least to smile, but it would not do.

‘Something is wrong,’ he said anxiously; ‘you are very pale; dear Miss Helen, what is it?’

And with one look at him, out it all came—the discovery of to-day, the event of to-morrow, with all my perplexities thereupon—in a burst of tears I had no power to restrain.

He listened with that sweet sympathy of his that I had often experienced before, and which never expressed itself in many words. He looked very grave, but not surprised,—of course he must have known it before I did,—and it did not strike me till afterwards how very coolly *he* seemed to have taken the intelligence.

‘Where were you going just now?’ he presently asked.

The question recalled me to the business in hand, and I told him that, as papa was still quite in the dark as to the whole affair, I thought I ought to telegraph immediately, and at least let him know what was going on.

He did not seem to dispute this. ‘But,’ said he, as he drew out his watch, ‘I fear, Miss Helen, it is too late. Perhaps not, however. But who will you send?’

It occurred to me that, in the extreme emergency, he might have offered to go himself, or at least offer his horse. But he did neither. Perhaps he read my thought, for he quickly added,—

‘I would go myself—to the end of the earth to serve *you*’ (even at that moment the words sent a wild rush of joy to my heart); ‘but it is impossible—it would look like revenge,’ he added, more as if soliloquizing than to me.

I thought I knew what he meant by these last words, and I could not help looking, as I felt, sympathetic, as I hastened to tell him that Robbie Gourlay would go, but that I knew nothing of the forms, and I supposed Robbie would be equally ignorant. He tore out a leaf of his pocket-book, took a pencil, and asked me what I wished to say. But I could suggest nothing. I only wished papa to come immediately. He put this in proper words for me, and told me I had not a moment to lose, and I hastened on.

I called Robbie to his door, and explained to him what I wanted. As I knew, he was quite ready to go, and more than that, ‘he knowed a man that wad lend him his horse in a jiffy, and be glad to do’t. But he maun see the message first, an’ mak’ sure he could read it;’ and not all my pleading that he would read it on horseback could prevent him unfolding the paper and conning the message.

‘Miss Fitz-James, Colston, to Rev. Dr. Fitz-James, Westermuir Manse.

‘Harriet and Mr. Scott are to be married to-morrow. Come immediately.’

‘I’ll gang for sure,’ said he; and, putting the paper care-



fully into his hat, and his hat on his head, he departed on his mission, assuring me 'he wad flee like the wund.'

I thought that Robbie's 'womankind' were unusually quiescent that night. It was wonderful they did not come all flocking to the door to greet me; probably he had given them the hint; but at all events I was glad, and I turned homewards. I knew the nearest station was twenty miles, at least, from Westermuir, and I did not think it possible papa could hear in time; but I had done my best, and that was comfort. As I had no mind to encounter Mr. Scott, I entered again by the back way, and had the pleasure of hearing Betsy—newly returned from Strathie—descanting in the kitchen on the extraordinary news, and 'the folk that were a' speaking about it.' Harriet had indeed made herself 'a nine days' wonder'!

I felt quite exhausted by this time, and if any further effort had been necessary I really could not have made it. But I no longer felt desolate. As it was, I gladly hailed Nurse's announcement that tea was ready. I would have liked to wait for Harriet this last night we were to be together; but Harriet already belonged to another, and he was with her now.

I was leisurely taking tea, and listening to Nurse—who had rallied her forces, and had begun to enlarge with great exultation on the 'grand marriage,' a little qualified, however, by her regrets for 'the Doctor, puir man, and Mr. Farquharson, and the rest,'—when I heard him go; and then I went up-stairs to Harriet. I knew she would not come to me.

As I had expected, I found her at the drawing-room window, looking after him, arrayed (for him, I suppose) in her lavender *barège*, and looking lovely. She turned round when I entered, her defiant looks all gone, and a softened, happy expression on her face.

'Do you know that you have had no dinner, dear?' said I, going up to her. 'At least you will come and have tea with me—it is the last night, you know, we will be together,' and my lip quivered in spite of myself.

'It isn't the last night we shall be together,' she said

quickly. 'What do you mean, Ellie? Do you think they will never let me come back? I'm not afraid of mama,' she subjoined, after a pause, in a reassured tone; 'and at all events you will come and see me; won't you, Ellie dear?'

'Perhaps Mr. Scott won't "let" me,' said I, with half a smile.

'I should like to see who he wouldn't "let," if *I* wished it,' said she, smiling proudly. 'If I asked half the parish to dinner, he would entertain them, if it would gratify me.'

I privately thought there was small danger of Mr. Scott being tried in that way. She continued,—

'We'll all be very happy yet, you'll see, Ellie. Papa and mama will soon get reconciled when it is over, and when they see how happy I am.'

'Are you so very happy?' I could not help saying.

'Am I not?' was the significant answer, given, too, in a manner that left no room for doubt. 'I only hope you and Marianne may be half as happy. When the Doctor, you know, Ellie—but we won't speak of that just now. One wedding is enough at a time.'

'I think so,' said I, drawing her to the door, and we went down-stairs together.

She must have been in good spirits, as, when we went into the parlour, where Nurse was hovering about the tea-table, on the tiptoe of expectation for the bride to make her appearance, she greeted her gaily.

'Well, Nurse, I hope you did not get too great a shock to-day?' A word was enough for Nurse.

'Eh, Miss Harrit,' she said, 'but ye've keepit your coortin' weel!—ye gied the folk an unco fricht the day. But I think ye nicht hae tell't Miss Heelen an' me, whan we were a' oor lanes. An' eh, but ye're gettin' a braw doon-sittin', an' a braw bridegroom forbye! an' I maun wish ye joy, my bairn—'deed maun I;' and, so saying, the good old woman grasped her 'bairn's' hand, and not only shook, but kissed it again and again. If it had been me, she would to a certainty have kissed myself; but Nurse had always stood on greater ceremony with Harriet.

'It was rael wiselike o' the Laird to come to the kirk the day, the same as ordinar,' was her final observation, as she prepared to retreat ; ' but I'm no' thinkin' he wad hear muckle o' the sermon, Miss Harrit, ony mair nor you.'

I thought of Mr. M'Call's strictures, and agreed with Nurse. The ice was now fairly broken ; and, after Nurse's exit, we talked together more unreservedly than we had done for some time,—indeed, ever since I came home from school,—she in the fulness of her heart at leaving home, and I in the prospect of parting with her.

She asked me, almost humbly, if I would not go to church with her,—a point I had already been earnestly debating in my own mind, and had come to the conclusion that I must, as the only one of her relations who was near her ; although I privately hoped that another, who had even a deeper interest in her than I had, would be in time also to countenance her, before the world, at least, in the step she was about to take.

' But what in the world will you do for a *trousseau* ? ' asked I, as the difficulty occurred to me. She smiled.

' Oh, Mr. Scott would have had every shop in London ransacked for me, if I had let him. I told him that my milliner's bills might ruin him afterwards ; but I would accept nothing from him just now—my own things would do.'

' And will you—will you—the word stuck in my throat—' will you be married in your white tulle ? ' I asked at length (feeling a little hypocritical, as well as constrained, in talking of this, knowing I had already done my best, if not to stop, at least to retard proceedings). However, she did not notice my embarrassment.

' No, no,' she answered ; ' we go off immediately after it. I must be dressed for travelling. But I do declare, Ellie,' she broke off with a little laugh, ' I don't believe I have even a pair of clean white gloves ; and I suppose you haven't such a thing either ? '

' Oh, no matter for me,' said I, laughing, and entering into it for the moment. ' I think Marianne has a pair that will

do for you. I will go this moment and search her drawers,' and I ran up-stairs.

Marianne's repositories were at all times a model of neatness, and provided with abundance of everything. Whenever any one was at a loss for anything—even mama sometimes—we all applied to Marianne, and were generally supplied; and the present was no exception, as I quickly found what I wanted. As I was pulling out drawer after drawer, and looking what other spoil might be made available for the occasion, the moonlight streamed into the room, and it all at once flashed upon me, for the first time since Nurse's tidings, that this was Sabbath evening. How unlike a Sabbath had it been to me! But my explorations and reflections were alike interrupted by Nurse's entrance. She had been hunting for me all over the house, to say that Robbie Gourlay was waiting at the kitchen door to speak to me. I ran down hastily, shutting the door of the kitchen regions carefully behind me, that Harriet might not hear. Robbie had failed in his mission. He had not got the horse he had expected, and had had to apply to the Doctor for the loan of his after all. But although he had found the clerks in the Edinburgh office still there, the country office was closed.

Robbie gave the details most minutely—how 'he had got in just as the steeples were chappin' ten, an' fand the office-chaps still to the fore; an' "I'm glad," says I, "to hae fand ye here."—"Wait a wee," says they; "I'm misdootin' the ither place is steekit, but we'll sune see," says he: and sae, after a cleek or twa, he tell't me they were awa'. I wadna believe the man for a minute, but I had to gie in at last, and come oot o' the place, for he was gaun awa' hissel'.—"That's a fine horse ye've gotten there," says he.—"Ay," says I, "he's weel aneuch; but he's no' dune muckle gude, it looks like, wi' yer nonsense, leavin' yer office places sae sune."—"Man, ye needna stand and glower at me that way," says he; "I canna help your bein' ower late." Sae I cam' awa'. But, eh me! the Doctor *was* ill about me being ower late. "Od, man, I'm vext at that!" says he' (I suspected Robbie's imagination had coined the

interjection at least). “What *will* Miss Heelen dae?” says he; ‘deed, an’ I’m wae for ye mysel’, Miss Heelen. What’ll ye dae noo?’

‘We can do nothing more, Robbie; but many, many thanks for all your trouble. Papa will thank you himself afterwards. But now you must come in and have something warm, after your long ride.’

‘Na, na, Miss Heelen, I’ll drink the bride’s health some ither day wi’ ye; but the wife’ll be won’ering what’s comed ower me the nicht;’ and with his accustomed salutation Robbie departed.

So that hope had failed. But I was glad it was decided one way or another, and I went back to Harriet, feeling that I could talk to her more freely now.

She was still sitting at the table, in the moonlight, and did not seem to have thought me long. I told her I had found what I wanted, and perhaps more; and she seemed pleased and grateful that I was at last taking an interest in the affair.

After prayers we sat talking far into the night. She seemed strangely softened in her new happiness, and relieved that it was all out, even though only to me. She told me *all* about it, and begged me to plead for her with papa and mama.

‘Say to them,’ she said, ‘that when they know him better they will think of him as I do’ (when a bride says ‘him,’ it is not difficult to guess who she means); ‘and tell mama,’ she added, with a quiver of the lip that would not be controlled,—‘tell her that it has been my great grief all along in this, that she knew nothing of it. And now, Ellie, won’t you kiss me, and wish me joy? I am so glad this day is over.’

I did kiss her many times, with tears that could not be restrained, and wished her all happiness. Never had she seemed so dear to me as now, when we were about to part. And yet, as we went up-stairs together, and again exchanged a mute caress at her room door, my heart echoed loudly her words. I also was ‘glad this day was over.’



## CHAPTER XV.

### NUPTIALS.

‘The ring is on,  
The “Wilt thou?” answered, and again  
The “Wilt thou?” asked, till, out of twain,  
Her sweet “I will” has made them one.’

**I**F there is any truth in the common saying, that ‘Happy is the bride that the sun shines on,’ then this wedding had every prospect of being happier than (I must say it) either of the parties deserved.

It really was cheering to see the sun that morning, for, now it had come to the point, I was nearly giving way altogether; but I was determined to keep up. The ceremony was to be at eleven o’clock (the earliest possible hour), and after I was dressed I hurried in to rouse Harriet. She was already up and dressing; the traces of tears were on her cheeks, but—as I knew it would—her manner was quiet and collected. My looks must have been sad tell-tales, for she came forward and put her arm round me.

‘Ellie,’ she said, with quivering lips, ‘if you look so pale I don’t know what I shall do.’

‘I know what I shall do,’ I said quickly, rousing myself and kissing her. ‘I shall be your maid to-day, and look out your dress, and get your things packed;’ and I set to work.

But fortunately, perhaps, for us both, Nurse at this moment knocked at the door to ask if she might lend a hand in dressing the bride; and brought a note to Harriet, which had just been sent,—from Mr. Scott, of course,—to the effect that Sir John Maitland would call for her at a quarter before eleven. (If

Harriet had not been in a 'state' at the time, she never would have shown me the note, with all its lover-nonsense and extravagances ; but I won't betray Mr. Scott's confidence.) I felt glad that it was good kind Sir John who was to act as her 'friend' on this occasion, and not a stranger ; but, for the first time, it struck to my heart what a desolate thing this marriage was, notwithstanding its splendid accompaniments. I drew her to me with a fond impulsive movement as the thought occurred ; but Nurse, less sentimental, begged us 'no' to think ony mair about it the noo,' but to go down and take some breakfast to cheer us, which we did.

After this, all was hurry and bustle. I had no time for sentiment ; but I certainly felt a strange sensation as I labelled her boxes and wrote the address—'Mrs. Scott, Royal Hotel, Carlisle.' Nurse and I dressed the bride—no very elaborate affair after all—in her blue silk dress (the palest blue, almost white), her light-grey travelling cloak, and white bonnet ; and sure am I that a lovelier bride was never dressed, though Nurse was loud in her lamentations about her being married in a bonnet.

Harriet would not even take the bouquet of white roses I had gathered for her. She said, 'No—not in the circumstances ;' and in my heart I confessed she was right. If the reader is at all curious as to my attire, I may state that I was one degree more like a bride than Harriet, as I was in pearl-grey silk.

Punctual to the hour, Sir John's carriage drove to the door. He looked rather grave when I met him in the lobby, and drew me into the dining-room to say a word.

He had only been informed of this affair late last night he said (I wondered in my own mind if he thought *I* was a party to it), when he was asked to give away the bride ; and it had placed him in a very awkward position.

He had consented *solely* on account of his friendship for my father. He could not approve of the young people's unauthorized proceedings ; as, though the Admiral's dying request excused the haste, yet Dr. Fitz-James's sanction might, and

certainly ought to have been obtained, and he had a just right to be displeased. But as it was to be, and there was certainly no time now to do anything else, he and Lady Maitland had thought it better that he, rather than any friend of Mr. Scott's, should give her away. Lady Maitland, he said, would have willingly come also, but he considered that that was lending too much countenance to what, if it were not disobedience, was certainly disrespect.

I honoured Sir John for this, and thanked him warmly for his considerate kindness; but I also explained that I had known no more of the matter than he did—having heard nothing till Nurse had returned from church.

He shook his head, and said it was 'Very bad, very bad;' but we both agreed that nothing more could be said to Harriet at present. And he was rather better than his word; for, when Harriet appeared, holding down her head, and evidently a good deal abashed, no father could have been more tender of her feelings.

'But where are the flowers, Miss Helen?' said he, looking at her as we were about to set out. 'I never heard of a bride without a bouquet.'

I explained that I had gathered a bouquet for her, but that Harriet did not wish to carry flowers in the circumstances.

'Very right, very right,' said he, when he had heard; 'but we can't do without the flowers, I think. We may look bright, you know, although not gay; by all means get the flowers, Miss Helen.'

I ran up-stairs and brought them down, and as we were late Sir John at once took her to the carriage. The footman had already placed her boxes, corded and addressed, on the carriage.

'Drive fast,' was Sir John's order, as we were late. 'Mr. Scott will think I have run away with his bride,' said he, with a little attempt at pleasantry, as he took his seat opposite us.

The fact of the marriage seemed to have transpired (secret



as it had been kept), as the Dalmany road was thronged with the country people, eagerly pressing forward to the scene of action. Harriet never lifted her head the whole way; but I remember being amused at seeing Nurse toiling along, her efforts redoubled at sight of the carriage, her faithful umbrella brandished in her hand, and her Bible conspicuous in the other; though what use the latter was to be of, she best knew.

The chapel was crowded, and many a one stood up on the pews to catch sight of the bride as she walked up the aisle, leaning on Sir John's arm, I following close behind. But she never once looked up, and her veil almost entirely hid her face from view. I looked to see who acted as 'friend' to Mr. Scott, and was amused to recognise my redoubtable friend of the lisp,—Colonel Elphinstone,—who was apparently carrying out his intention of being 'dethently thivil,' by acting as groom's man on the occasion. We did not expect to meet here—he and I—when last we met. I saw he recognised me, as his never-failing eye-glass was immediately put in requisition to view us as we approached.

Mr. Charteris, in his surplice, had already taken his place, and we took ours. Sir James and Lady Elphinstone stood near, in towering majesty, and two or three gentlemen—I did not distinguish who—beside them; the rest of the building was occupied by the village people and families in the neighbourhood.

Not a sound was heard as the clergyman began; and I was compelled, however unwillingly, to acknowledge to myself the beauty and solemnity of the English service, even though read by Mr. Charteris.

Neither the bride nor the bridegroom seemed to be in the smallest degree nervous. Her responses, though low, were firm; and his distinct enough to be heard all over the church.

When the usual question was asked, 'Who giveth this woman?' etc., and when only the voice of Sir John Maitland responded, the feeling again came over me, what a desolate

thing it was that Harriet, having living parents of her own, should have to be indebted for this tender office to a stranger. But it was her own doing.

The ceremony over, the bride and bridegroom led the way into the vestry, where for the last time she affixed her name as Harriet Fitz-James.

Whatever had been Sir John Maitland's feelings in regard to this marriage, he showed no lack of warmth in his greeting to bride and bridegroom, now that it had actually taken place; and this, in a manner, covered the want of it in the extremely formal ones which followed from Sir James and Lady Elphinstone. Colonel Elphinstone, offering a hand, which, however, she scarcely touched, 'Withed much joy to Mithtreth Thecott,' and then languidly retreated, as if the effort had been too much for him.

He certainly was a curious specimen of a British officer; however, I was not thinking of him then. *They* were taking leave. The Admiral had wished to see them immediately after the ceremony, and they were to proceed at once to Hainslie, on their way to the station.

'Good-bye, Ellie darling,' said Harriet, clasping me in her arms and kissing me, as she was going off; 'remember my message to papa and mama, and my love to the rest. I will write to-morrow, dear.' And Colonel Elphinstone led her to the carriage.

Mr. Scott looked supremely happy, and kissed me also, whispering, 'You won't object now, Helen?' and was gone.

The bells were ringing a merry peal, and the crowd had thronged out of the chapel, and stood on either side of the gateway to see them depart. Conspicuous among the crowd I noticed Robbie Gourlay and his better half, and Nurse. Robbie and Nurse seemed in the midst of some altercation as the bridegroom came out.

'Man, Robbie,' I heard her say, 'canna ye wait a wee?'

But her remonstrance seemed to be of no avail, as Robbie, who all this time had held his hand in his pocket, suddenly drew it forth, and the next instant a shoe of considerable

dimensions whizzed through the air, and hit Mr. Scott right on the cheek. Evidently he did not remember, if he ever knew, the old Scottish custom, for he looked aghast at the unprovoked attack ; but Sir John, who stood at the carriage-door, whispered a word to him, and he instantly turned, bowed and smiled to the people, and then sprang into the carriage.

Nurse, it appeared, had also provided herself with a slipper, which she threw as the carriage was driving off. It alighted right on the top, and I saw the footman reach over to throw it down ; but as he was assailed by cries from the crowd, of 'Let it be, man !' he desisted ; and the last sight I saw, as the carriage turned down the road, was—the slipper ; while, at the same time, a shower of gold and silver, from Mr. Morton's hand, agreeably diverted the attention of the people.

There was a little delay in bringing up the carriages, and while we were waiting at the door of the chapel Colonel Elphinstone strolled up to me.

'Aw——,' he said to me, 'I thuppothe you have known of thith affair for thome time ?'

'No, indeed,' said I, rousing myself. 'If *I* had known it, it certainly would not have taken place to-day,—perhaps not at all.' Colonel Elphinstone elevated his glass to look at me.

'Aw——.' After a prolonged stare,—'May I athk why ?'

'Well, since you have asked me, Colonel Elphinstone,—I would not have volunteered the information,—but had I had any hint of what was to take place to-day, I should certainly have taken steps to inform papa ; and his sanction was not likely to be given so suddenly.'

A slight sneer was perceptible on Colonel Elphinstone's lips.

'Aw——.' After another prolonged stare of astonishment,—'May I athk if her friendth will cut her for marrying above her thtathon ?'

(I really don't believe he meant to be very impertinent,

after all; it seemed to be genuine surprise, mixed with his natural puppyism.)

‘That depends on the explanation Mr. Scott may give,’ said I, with what dignity I could assume.

He seemed to have a shade of sense in his composition, too, as he did not resent this speech; and just then Sir John came up to say that the carriage waited.

‘Aw——, allow me,’ said Colonel Elphinstone, presenting his arm, in virtue, I suppose, of his office, and we actually walked out together.

Sir John and I did not speak much during the drive home; but he was very kind, and said, as he set me down at the door, that ‘he would see papa in a day or two, and explain matters to him.’ Truly, he was a friend indeed.

I had the keys of the Manse with me (both Nurse and Betsy being, of course, at the chapel, and not home yet), and very desolate it seemed as I let myself into the empty house. I sat down for a few minutes in the deserted parlour,—with the breakfast things still standing on the table, as they had been left in the hurry and bustle of the morning,—and thought what a change had taken place for all of us since yesterday at this hour! and how little the wisest of us could foresee what even a day would bring forth! But I could not settle to think yet (I had scarcely been able, indeed, to think connectedly since Nurse’s return from church the day before), still less to realize all that had taken place; and I rose mechanically to change my dress, and begin setting things a little to rights for the home party, whose arrival I anticipated in the course of the day, in consequence of Mr. Scott’s letter. But as I went slowly up-stairs and looked into the deserted rooms,—Harriet’s with her drawers open and all her things scattered about, as she had left them, never to return to it as her home,—I fairly broke down, and cried heartily for very loneliness.

I was glad when Nurse and Betsy at last came home, not in the least sharing my feelings, but fairly out of their wits with triumph and delight at ‘Miss Harrit’s’ great good fortune, and

the happy manner in which everything had gone off; qualified only by Nurse's regret that the ceremony had taken place in the chapel.

'If it had jist been in the kirk,' she lamented; 'but, eh me! to think o' ony o' us a' bein' in that Popish place! An' speakin' o' that, Miss Heelen,' she went on, 'wasna Morton up in the air the day? He was near aboot as blythe's the bridegroom. There'll be something grand in the papers the morn, ye'll see; for I heard him tellin' a man to saddle a horse *instantly*, an' ride intil Edinburgh wi' word to them a'. An' eh, didna Miss Harrit look bonnie?—an' she *has* been lucky! But, eh my! what will the Minister an' the mistress say when they hear tell o't a'?'

Ay, what would they say? And, when Nurse at length bustled away to see about dinner (it being now almost two o'clock), I returned to that again and again. Harriet, however, was beyond the reach of reproaches for the present; and I turned my thoughts to the brighter side of the picture, when all would, as she said, have come right again. I pictured to myself how she would look in Dalmany, moving easily and gracefully through the splendid rooms, no unworthy mistress of that ancient house,—no unworthy wearer of the time-honoured name. Finally, I went to our Willie's grave, and prayed for her happiness there; and braced myself for all that might be before me in the ineffable calm and peace of that silent resting-place.

I had all the day to indulge in these reflections, as the home-party, whose arrival I had hourly expected, never appeared. Towards evening it suddenly occurred to me that some explanation was due to aunt; and, glad of the excuse to go out, I told Nurse I would take tea at the farmhouse, charging her to come for me immediately if they arrived.

As I had expected, I found my cousins not easy to pacify. Like several others in the parish, they had not thought fit to go to hear Mr. McCall's eloquence the day before, but had gone to Mr. Dodds's church, and had consequently heard nothing of the affair till the bells ringing in the morning had

enlightened them, when they were aghast to hear that it was Harriet.

‘And you never said a word to us about it, even on Friday morning when I was at the Manse!’ said Lizzie indignantly.

‘For the best of all reasons,’ returned I; ‘I did not know it myself.’ And then I explained the matter as well as I could, softening it as much as possible for Harriet, and ascribing it all to the Admiral’s illness.

Their astonishment at the whole affair was extreme.

‘But I think you might have asked us to go to church with you,’ said Lizzie, only half mollified. ‘You might have run over even last night, or at least sent a message.’

‘No,’ said aunt with dignity; ‘Helen was quite right. In such circumstances I would certainly not have gone.’

‘Well, hasn’t she got a splendid marriage?’ cried Lizzie, when she had somewhat recovered the news. ‘But, do you know, I always thought it—ever since the day he came to call.’

Well, I hadn’t. But perhaps I was blind.

The rest of the evening passed very happily, and I could not help laughing at the girls’ lamentations that Harriet had not been dressed as a bride; and that there had been no favours, not even a bride’s-cake. Had that been all that was wanting, it had been well.

The travellers did not arrive that night, but the greater part of it was past before I got home, and I got through the rest of it tolerably well.

If any were still in ignorance of Harriet’s doings, the next morning left them no excuse for being so. I wondered what Mr. M’Call would think of me when he read the announcement:—

‘Married—At the Episcopal Chapel, Dalmany, on the 25th instant, by the Reverend W. M. Charteris, Incumbent, Reginald Frederick Scott, Esq. of Dalmany, Mid-Lothian, and Shirley Park, Sussex, to Harriet Frances, eldest daughter of the Reverend Dr. Fitz-James of Colston.’

No use, indeed, in keeping secret what all the world was to

know in a few hours. But this was not all. Glancing down the paper, my eye was attracted by a paragraph headed 'Marriage in High Life,' and running thus :—

'The marriage of Mr. Scott of Dalmany with Miss Harriet Fitz-James was celebrated yesterday, at the Episcopal Chapel, Dalmany, the Reverend W. M. Charteris, Incumbent, officiating. Owing to domestic affliction, the ceremony was strictly private, only the nearest relatives and friends of the young couple being present, including Sir James and Lady Elphinstone of Colston Hill, Lord Duntraith, Hon. Captain Kerr, Hon. Major Hayes, etc. etc. The lovely bride, in the unavoidable absence of her father, was given away by her friend, Sir John Maitland, and was accompanied to the altar by her sister, Miss Helen Fitz-James, who acted as bride's maid. Colonel Elphinstone officiated as groom's man on the occasion ; and immediately after the ceremony the young couple drove off to Edinburgh, *en route*, we believe, for the Lakes. Owing to circumstances already hinted at, the rejoicings on this auspicious occasion have been postponed until the return of Mr. and Mrs. Scott to Dalmany.'

'Well done, Mr. Morton!' thought I, laughing, as I laid down the paper. 'No one reading that could guess the real state of matters ; or that the "unavoidable absence" of the bride's father was caused simply by his never having been told of it ; and poor me !'—I could not help laughing that Mr. Morton had not thought proper to give me an adjective before my name ; although (let me whisper it, reader) I really thought I had looked very well. It was too bad !

I had no time to bewail Mr. Morton's opinion of me, however, as I had plenty of business on hand for that day, in preparing for the return of the travellers, and making everything look as bright and as cheerful as I could—poor expedient, after all, in place of the face that ought to have been there to welcome them, and was not ! I had Marianne's repositories, which I had invaded, to put to rights before she made her appearance—although I had small hopes of being able to do so in the order she would approve. I had also Harriet's little

room to restore to order, poor dear (and a good many tears I let fall over the task); and I had, in addition to all, and almost for the first time in my life, to keep Nurse up to her duties; otherwise, in her exultation over the newspaper paragraphs, the other rooms would have had every chance of being overlooked. About mid-day I put on my hat and sallied forth on some household errands, congratulating myself that my reign in that way was nearly over. I had had about enough of it during the last three weeks, as housekeeping never had been in Harriet's line.

I was amused, in passing Mrs. Gourlay's, to find her sitting at her door conning the newspapers. She ran forward to ask me what I thought of the paragraph; and, after hearing her opinion and Robbie's, and everybody's, on the event of yesterday, I was coming away, when she called me back to tell me something in a mysterious whisper.

'Ye'll mind, Miss Heelen, what I was tellin' ye ance aboot Katie? Weel, I was a' wrang. She's deid, puir lassie! To think o' her bein' deid a' this time, an' her auntie ne'er to hae kent that we hadna gotten the letters till twa-three weeks syne! The ship had gane doon, an' they ne'er cam' to hand.'

'And what have you heard?' I asked, wondering Nurse had not got the tidings before this; and noticing also, for the first time, that she wore a new black gown.

'Oh, she had run awa' frae Leddy Jane's, for she wasna guid till her, an' she was frichted her faither wad be angered at her (I'm sure she needna hae been: he ne'er spoke a crabbed word to Katie in his days); sae her auntie an' her made it up atween them to gang aff to Americay, wi' nonsense notions in their heids aboot makin' their fortin' at dressmakin'. But they hadna been oot very lang when she took the fivver, and dee'd on the twenty-second o' last February—jist sax months gane. Puir bit thing! we'll say nae ill noo, but it was ill dune o' her to gang awa' without lettin' us ken.'

'It is satisfactory, at least, to know the real facts at last,' said I sympathetically. 'Was Robbie very much cast down



about it?' I asked, surprised that he had not mentioned such tidings to me on Sabbath night.

'He was that; but ye ken it was jist what he aye thoct, an' he's kind o' glad jist to ken the richts o't, as ye say, Miss Heelen. An' he was unco ta'en up aboot Miss Harrit's weddin' for a' that,' said she, turning the subject with a versatility that was quite wonderful. 'We got the word on Saturday, but he wadna tell ye naething aboot Katie or it was a' ower, for fear it wasna lucky to hear tell o' a death that same day; an' we didna pit on oor blacks till ance we cam' back frae the kirk that day, sae I dinna think it could dae ony ill oor bein' at it, Miss Heelen?' she added, looking inquiringly at me.

Good, kind, simple hearts! If every one was as much afraid of harming his fellow-beings, it would be a different world this! I could fully understand now the unwonted reticence both of Robbie and of Nurse; and, with a few warm words of reassurance and sympathy, I went on my way.

It was pretty late in the evening when the travellers arrived. I had sat expecting them by the cheerful fire, with the tea waiting on the table, nearly as long as I had done for Harriet on the night of her eventful visit to Hainslie, glad indeed to get them home again, but with a feeling of embarrassment I had never known before; for what was I to say? At last I heard the welcome wheels, and ran to the door.

A few minutes of confusion, kisses, and embraces, and they were all in; but though Harriet was uppermost in all our thoughts, it seemed as if no one could mention her name first. They had enjoyed the visit much, they said, and had been away the whole of the previous day on a distant exploratory excursion (thus tacitly accounting for the fact of their non-arrival at home,—they had not received the news till night). Then there was a silence. The ice was soon broken, however, by Harry, who, seeing nobody but me to welcome him, anxiously inquired for Harriet.

'Where's Harriet?' he asked, poor little thing! 'and where's Nurse?' and away he ran to seek them.

‘Yes, where’s Harriet?’ began Marianne, looking almost reproachfully at me (as if *I* could by any means have helped it).

‘I don’t know, I’m sure, Marianne, any more than you,’ I said; ‘I suppose she’s with her husband.’

‘Oh, you ought to know all about it,’ said Tom, fixing his mischievous eyes on me; ‘you “accompanied the bride to the altar.”’

‘I “accompanied the bride to the altar,” Tom,’ I said warmly (for I felt indignant that I should always be considered a party to the occasion, ‘but very much against my will. I knew no more about it than you did, till just a few hours before.’

‘Most extraordinary behaviour!’ broke in papa, who was hurriedly walking up and down the room. ‘At least you can tell us the after-circumstances, surely, Ellie. The letter explains nothing at all.’

‘Oh, did she write you?’ I asked, surprised.

‘No,’ said Marianne; ‘Mr. Scott did (didn’t you know it?), telling papa that Harriet had promised to marry him, and that they wished it to be as soon as possible,—on Monday morning, in fact,—as the Admiral was not expected to live many hours, and wished it over; and that he hoped papa would consent;—just nonsense, you know, as he didn’t give him time to say either yes or no.’

Yes, it was very bad! It was no wonder they were hurt! I could not defend Harriet, but I tried to soften matters as much as possible; and as we sat at tea I told them all that had occurred since Friday night as circumstantially as I could, —keeping to myself, however, one or two little things, such as Mr. Scott’s little escapade on Saturday evening, which I did not wish to relate to his prejudice; also my meeting with the Doctor, which I did not see concerned any one but myself. Papa was much pleased at Sir John’s considerate kindness; and the little episodes of Mr. M’Call and Colonel Elphinstone made them all (angry as they were, and had a right to be, too) laugh heartily. Mama only hoped I had not hurt their feelings, and wished Mr. M’Call, at least, were within reach,

that she might apologise to him,—at which we laughed again.

But after Marianne and I were shut in our own room at night, we went over it all anew.

‘Well, it does not look so black after all,’ was her final summing up, after we had weighed all the pros and cons. ‘When we think it was a dying request,—that makes a great difference. But they would have done it at any rate,’ she added, again changing. ‘If they had not had this, they would have got some other excuse. They were determined to be married; and I suppose Mr. Scott knew pretty well his character would not stand daylight.’

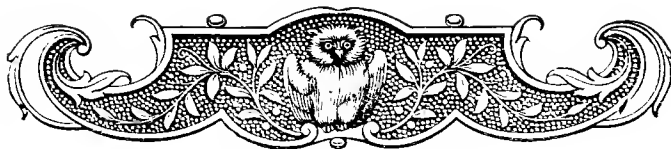
‘You had better not say that to Harriet,’ I said. ‘She would never speak to you again. She thinks him all perfection.’

‘Oh, well, it is no wonder!’ candidly assented Marianne. ‘He is a very lovable young man. But it was very bad of them, for all that; and papa says he will take no notice of them till they apologise. I suppose Mr. Scott thinks he is so grand that he may do anything; but I can tell him he is mistaken;’ and she nodded her little head indignantly.

‘Were mama and papa very much hurt when they heard it?’ I ventured for the first time to ask.

‘Of course they were! Such a surprise! Papa couldn’t believe his eyes when he read the letter. And such a slight to him,’ she went on, with growing heat, ‘to have Mr. and Mrs. Wood, and everybody, reading it in the newspapers next morning, and he to have known nothing about it! They were *very* much hurt, and so was I. And poor little Ellie,’ she wound up with, caressingly stroking my hair, ‘what a time you have had, all by yourself! Poor little girl!’

Little girl! It was long since I had felt that. I seemed to have lived a lifetime since I left school! One thing I knew: I was glad that the explanation was over,—my share of it, at least,—and gladder still that I had them all home again.



## CHAPTER XVI.

### EXPLANATIONS.

‘Behind the cloud the sun is shining.’



THE first question Marianne asked me next morning, as she was dressing, was, had I ever seen the Doctor?

Fortunately I was still in bed, and I could answer easily enough that I had seen him two or three times.

‘Then he has come out of his mood, has he? I’m sure he hadn’t when I went away. I can’t help laughing when I think of you and me sitting on the stones, and his coming down and scolding me as he did! If it had been you, Ellie, you would never have spoken to him again. I wish I had dignity too. I declare, people just do anything they like with me;’ and she went on good-naturedly brushing her hair, as if the slight had not gone very deep. I thought of that day and the various remembrances it called up, and felt glad that he really *had* changed, whatever had been the cause of the ‘mood.’

‘Do you know,’ Marianne went on, after a little, ‘I am beginning to think now—though I didn’t use to think it—that Dr. Blackburn *had* a fancy for Harriet, and that it was that made him so cross, poor man, when he must have seen that he had no chance.’

It was my own conviction, certainly, but somehow I did not like to hear it expressed by another. Marianne did not seem to wish for a reply, and passed on lightly to other subjects.

‘I wonder when these two runaways mean to let us hear

from them ?' said she, laughing. 'I suppose they are taking all this time to concoct their apology. It will have to be a pretty humble one, I can tell them, before we receive them into favour again. You know, Ellie,' continued she, as she selected a clean collar from her drawer, 'I am not like mama and papa, for I think it's a grand thing for Harriet. You know she wasn't like you and me, content with bread and butter—she must always have cake ; but I'm angry at their doing it, as Nurse would say, "in such a hidelins way." It was very wicked of them both—*very* ;' and, with an unwonted show of indignation, Marianne fluttered out of the room.

Harriet's ears might have rung that morning with the comments passed on her conduct at the breakfast-table ; and perhaps they did, as a letter, or rather a joint epistle from her and her husband, arrived that same evening. It might not have been received quite so cordially, however, but for the fact of Sir John Maitland having called in the course of the day, who had explained and smoothed matters over as far as might be. Mama told us, when he was gone, what he had said. Good kind friend, he had been very lenient !

There was no doubt, he told them, that the Admiral had been feverishly anxious for this marriage, which had probably put the idea of an immediate union into the young people's heads, although he understood they had been engaged a week or two before ; and that he was quite sure it had been from no slight to Dr. Fitz-James that he was not apprized of it sooner : but he could see, he said with a smile, that Mr. Scott was a little afraid that the Doctor's prejudices might not be exactly in his favour, and that they seemed to have acted on the principle of youth in general,—that it was better to do before asking leave, what they were resolved to do at all hazards. Papa had asked him, as a friend, if he knew anything definite against Mr. Scott's character, as the country people had so many reports about him ; and Sir John had answered that in this instance, as in most others, reports were greatly exaggerated ; that he knew he had been a little gay, perhaps, as young men in his position would be, but, so far, at least, as

he was aware, certainly not worse than his neighbours; and that he firmly believed, with the Admiral, that this would be the settling of him. He was very deeply attached to Miss Fitz-James, and he thought there was every prospect of happiness for them both, and that if the young people made proper apologies (as he admitted they ought certainly to do) he really thought they might be received again into favour. He added—what, of course, we knew already—that in point of worldly circumstances Mr. Scott was an eligible match for any young lady in the land. It had been late on Sabbath evening when Mr. Scott had come to him, and business matters had consequently been but slightly touched upon; but that Mr. Scott's intentions towards his wife had been of the most liberal nature, and that, of course, now papa had a right to satisfy himself as to that (and I was very sure that if papa were pleased on other points he would be very easily satisfied on that). On the whole, Sir John's visit had been quite cheering, and certainly paved the way for the letter which arrived afterwards.

'This is frae Miss Harrit, at long an' last,' said Nurse triumphantly, bringing in the note; 'it's the Dalmany seal, I'm sure.'

It was very clever of Nurse, as it was a gentleman's handwriting, and bore not the smallest resemblance to Harriet's, and I didn't know that she had ever seen the Dalmany seal before. It was from Mr. Scott to papa, and was, of course, taken to the study; but afterwards mama brought it and read it to us. It was a very proper and gentlemanly letter—the best he could have written under the circumstances. It was dated from Carlisle, and was as follows:—

'MY DEAR DR. FITZ-JAMES,—As I presume you have returned to Colston, I lose no time in addressing you on a subject which I hope our mutual friend, Sir John Maitland, has ere this in some measure explained.

'When your daughter consented to be my wife, we never intended taking any step without your sanction—certainly not without your knowledge; but circumstances, altogether

unforeseen, seemed to decide otherwise. The Admiral, my uncle, is very ill—dying, in fact, as you are no doubt aware. As you may also be aware, he has been my guardian from childhood; and you cannot be surprised that, when (cognisant as he was of my attachment to your daughter) he expressed it as his last and fondest wish to see me married, I should consider it a sacred duty to endeavour to comply with his request. A grave difficulty thus presented itself to us, leaving us no alternative but the course we adopted, as, of course, had you been consulted in the orthodox manner, delays might have occurred which would have been fatal to the fulfilment of his wishes; but it was an omission in duty to you which, in justice to my wife, as well as in vindication of myself, I must add caused us very deep regret, and has been the great detracting circumstance in the whole affair.

‘One word more. There might, no doubt, have been simpler modes of having the ceremony performed, which would have brought it less prominently before the public than the one I chose; but none of them seemed to me consistent with the respect due to your daughter and my wife, and that consideration *alone* led me to decide as I did. I have made a simple statement of facts, and leave them to speak for themselves. Trusting that you will receive this as the only apology in my power to make, I remain yours sincerely, and with much respect,

REGINALD F SCOTT.

‘P.S.—Mrs. Scott writes by the same post.’

And Mrs. Scott did write by the same post, and this is what she said:—

‘MY DEAREST MAMA,—What am I to say in excuse for myself? I think the best way will be to say nothing. Mr. Scott has written explaining matters to papa, and I need only add that I am sure you know me better than to suppose I would have acted as I did without your consent, if it *could* have been otherwise. I know you are a little prejudiced against him; but I am sure, when you know him, you will

think of him as I do. I feel sure you will. I hope papa did not scold poor little Ellie ( I know *you* wouldn't), as she was innocent of the whole affair, and did everything short of forbidding Mr. Scott the house. I hope we will yet be all very happy together. Do write me. If I only had a letter from home I should be perfectly happy. I hope to see you very soon ; but our return depends on the Admiral's health. (We have telegrams every few hours.) Love to all, and believe me ever, dearest mama, your affectionate

HARRIET.

'*P.S.*—Tell Marianne that I was so obliged for her gloves. I shall order a box for her from Paris.'

Marianne, as usual, was the first to speak.

'Well,' she said, 'those letters are at least intelligible ; but you could have made nothing out of the other—neither one thing nor another. I wonder what possessed him to write it? I suppose, now, papa will have to forgive them, and it will all go on happily like a fairy tale; and I'm sure they don't deserve it, either of them.'

'If we all got only what we deserved, my dear,' said mama, quite mollified, 'I am afraid we would get very little. I was very much hurt at Harriet's conduct ; but she has done all she could, poor dear, to make up for it, and I think we must really forget it. I shall write to-night and tell her so, and I shall try to get papa to write as soon as possible to Mr. Scott.'

'It's well to be Harriet,' said Marianne, pretending to look aggrieved, though all the time as glad as I was that matters were taking this course ; 'she always gets off in some way. If I did such a thing, now, or if Ellie were to run off with Dr. Blackburn, nobody would forgive us. Dear me, Ellie, you needn't get angry! I never expected you would really do it,' said she innocently.

I was not angry, only considerably startled ; but in a moment I saw that she had only selected him as the most unlikely person she could think of for such an escapade, especially with me, who, as she firmly believed, had just been at mortal feud with him. Mama smiled too at the idea, and



shook her head reprovingly at Marianne, as she left the room for the purpose, I believe, of reading Harriet's letter over again in private.

'So,' was Tom's comment when he read the letters, 'Mrs. Harriet's been all day at that, and her husband too, I suspect; however, if everybody else is pleased, I'll say nothing.'

I did not see papa's letter to Mr. Scott, but mama told us next morning that he had written.

'I am so glad,' she said, 'that he wrote last night, as we don't know where they may be to-morrow. It was a beautiful letter, my dears, with a great deal of good advice in it to Mr. Scott; and whether he is offended or not, it was quite right.'

And so the matter rested for the present.

Papa went up to Hainslie in the course of the day, to inquire for the Admiral. He had rallied considerably; and when he heard papa was there he desired to see him, and expressed to him his warm satisfaction at the connection his nephew had formed, at the same time explaining the share he had himself had in hastening it, which he hoped papa would overlook; and adding that, on the verge of another world as he was, such considerations as rank and fortune seemed very secondary indeed, and he trusted this union would conduce not only to the happiness, but also to the welfare, of both. He may have said more on the same subject, but papa did not tell us; and I think the interview altogether did more to reconcile him to this marriage than anything else could have done.

If any one considers that we were either blind, or affecting to be blind, to the worldly advantages of this match, and that it was not likely we could be so in reality, let me plainly say to such that we were not (perhaps not a parent or a family in the land could possibly have been so). But, as the Admiral had said, there are times when such considerations seem very secondary indeed—as less than the dust, when weighed in the balance with other and greater things. In the present case we were compelled to think of this.

Papa was glad indeed that he had made this visit, when the next evening brought tidings of the Admiral's death.

It had been rather sudden at the last. Mr. Scott, however, had been telegraphed for, and had been with him some hours before all was over. Harriet he had left in Edinburgh, where they were to remain till after the funeral.

Good old man! would that every one left behind him as pleasant a record! If his actions were not great, they were good; his life an unsullied page that all might read. He had 'fought a good fight,' and the victory was won!

Marianne and I wrote to Harriet the following day, to cheer her in her solitude.

It was a beautiful evening, and I carried the letters over to the post myself. Harriet would have been very indignant had she seen me, for she never would walk beyond the gates herself after dinner, or allow us to do so; but it was my favourite hour, and I did not see that it was at all unladylike to enjoy it.

I had posted the letters, and was turning homewards, when I caught sight of two gentlemen at a little distance, in the act, as it appeared, of parting. One was Dr. Blackburn—the other, as far as I could distinguish, was my evening acquaintance, Captain Hirsch. I did not bow, however, as I thought they did not observe me; and I was startled to hear footsteps behind me a minute or two afterwards, and Dr. Blackburn's voice,—

'You seem in a hurry to-night, Miss Helen; no more telegrams, I hope?'

'Oh no,' I said, smiling, as I gave him my hand (marvelling, however, at the extraordinary *sang froid* with which he alluded to the event); 'I hope to have no more of these; there is no danger of Marianne following the example, and you know I wouldn't tell upon myself.'

He smiled at the idea of me eloping.

'I think there is equally small risk of your astonishing us in that way, Miss Helen.'

Really his equanimity was remarkable; he seemed to have a double coat of philosophy, ready to wrap himself in when occasion warranted. Could I forget that day at Colmuir End,

when he had been in the very depths of despair about Harriet, and that, too, when, in the nature of things, he could only have had doubts on the subject (unless, indeed, he had put his fate to the touch, and learned his doom, which I could not quite think he had done)? and here he was again, now that he had lost her for ever, in as good spirits at least as I had ever seen him (a great contrast to poor Mr. Farquharson, whom I had also met), and talking of the event with as much coolness as if he had no personal interest in the matter. Perhaps, indeed, like David, he only fasted and wept while life was trembling in the balance; but as soon as it had taken wings and soared away—as soon as the breath had departed for ever, and left behind it only a lump of unconscious clay—then he arose from the earth, and washed and anointed himself, and came into nature's temple, and worshipped! Quite as inexplicable as his neighbours was Dr. Blackburn.

All this time we had been walking along in the direction of home, and when we came to the bridge I thought we would have parted company; but he said he had a visit to make in that direction, and walked on.

'Do you know, Miss Helen,' said he suddenly, after a little pause in the conversation, 'it seems strange, you and I walking here to-night. This time last week I was preparing to leave Colston for ever!'

This was a blow; I could not disguise the sudden pain.

'To leave Colston!' I exclaimed in terror,—'to leave us!'

'Not now,' he said, with a smile that shed sunshine on my heart, grave as it still was; 'not now,—the sacrifice was laid on the altar, but it will never be offered now.'

He paused, apparently in deep and solemn thought; and I was puzzling over his words, which I could make nothing of, when he went on—his next remark strangely apart from the last,—

'I wonder what you have thought of me of late weeks, Miss Helen?' and he looked down at me earnestly as he spoke, as if pleading for forgiveness of past misunderstandings.

But I could make no sort of reply to this—I could not tell

him all I had thought of him ; but the happy tears filled my eyes, to think that at all events he was different now ; and when we came to the gate he took my hand in his, in his own old way (which to me was like none other), and looking down at me again earnestly and kindly, he said,—

‘Then we are friends again, Miss Helen, are we not?’

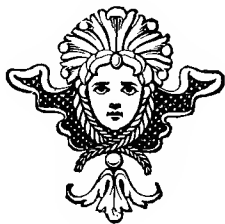
‘Yes,’ I said, looking up at him now, and smiling through the tears that *would* start into my eyes at his tone. ‘And I am glad ; I thought we were never to be so again.’

He did not reply to this, only opened the gate for me to pass in ; then, saying, with a smile, that he would call soon to congratulate us on the marriage, he departed.

Marianne was coming out with a watering-pot in her hand to water her flowers when I reached the door.

‘Ellie, you look radiant!’ was her salutation to me. ‘Have you had a pleasant walk, and did you post the letters?’

But I answered only the last of these questions,—I had posted the letters.





## CHAPTER XVII.

### A NEW BEGINNING.

‘Huntingtower is mine, Jeanie,  
Huntingtower is mine, lassie,  
Huntingtower, and Blairnagower,  
And a’ that’s mine is thine, Jeanie.’



THE Admiral’s funeral took place on Tuesday ; and there papa met his son-in-law for the first time. Of course on such an occasion very little conversation was possible, but papa seemed to have been pleased with the interview, we thought. He said that, at all events, whatever his faults were, he was not without a heart. Harriet, he told us, was still in Edinburgh, but they were to be home at the end of the week.

It is strange how soon one grows accustomed to any change, even the greatest ! Harriet’s absence had at first made a sad blank in our home-circle ; but gradually, although not filled up, it ceased to be prominently before us ; and now the stream of our daily life flowed on again, just as smoothly as if no ripple had ever agitated its surface. A stone had been thrown into its depths, and the circles at first had been wide, but they had lessened by degrees ; and the water flowed over it as it lay beneath, and now only a recollection remained of the spot where it had fallen.

Still we wearied to see her ; and great was our family satisfaction when Nurse brought in the report from the village, on the Friday evening, that Mr. and Mrs. Scott had come home.

‘I wonder if they will call to-day ?’ said Marianne next

morning; 'they ought to come here the first thing they do, certainly.'

And Marianne was amply satisfied with their fulfilment of duty, as about three o'clock that same day I saw from the garden the Dalmany carriage drive up, and Mr. Scott handed out his wife.

I would not go in till the first reception was over, and went to my room on pretence of brushing my hair, to occupy a minute or two. At the door I encountered Marianne rushing out of it.

'Harriet is here; are you not coming, Ellie?' asked she breathlessly.

'In a minute,' I said; but I made the minute ten before I went. For, philosophize as people will, these family interviews are usually embarrassing enough, where one of the parties is almost a total stranger, even where all else is smooth.

Harriet was sitting on the sofa in her deep mourning dress, talking to mama, when I entered; and I really thought I had judged wisely in having delayed as I did, as all embarrassment, if any had been, seemed to have vanished now. She started up and ran forward to greet me, while her husband came promptly forward also. He had been talking to Marianne and—to my astonishment—Tom, who had evidently got himself up for the occasion, and looked quite at his ease.

'Have you got over your fatigues and cares now, Ellie?' said Harriet, kissing me gaily. 'You have no idea what a good little mouse she was, mama. Never mind, Ellie, I'll do as much for you some day;' and she looked quite radiant.

Mr. Scott also wore an animated, happy expression, which, however, did not contrast unpleasingly with his mourning dress; and he received my greeting very cordially.

Harriet had evidently got over any little embarrassment she might have felt at first meeting, and was now quite at her ease, giving mama an animated account of something that had happened when she was away, which appeared to amuse her greatly.

'Do you know, mama,' she was saying when I overheard

her, 'I was quite insulted at Dryburgh. The people had got it into their heads somehow that I was Mr. Scott's sister, and when he put down our names in the visitors' book the old man took a sly peep to see who we were; and then he looked at me with such compassion, and held up his hands as if he couldn't help it. "Eh, puir thing!" he said; "sirs me! ye dinna mean to say ye're marriet!" Was it not an insult to my matronly air?'

We all laughed, of course.

'He seemed to pity her so intensely for having to trust to my tender mercies,' said Mr. Scott, laughing also at the recollection.

'Well, I don't know about Marianne,' continued Harriet, still laughing; 'but I am quite sure Ellie would never have met with such a slight—she is always so dignified and proper. Ah, you should have had her with you, Reginald!' with a saucy smile to him; 'she would have kept you in order.'

Mr. Scott and I looked at each other with mutual appreciation.

'I fear Helen would consider me a hopeless subject,' he said, laughing, and coming forward to the window where I was sitting. 'You did once, I know—ah, I heard of that.'

I was amazed at the audacity with which he alluded to his own misdeeds; but it really was pleasant to see them both so happy. Papa came in just as they were going away.

Harriet flushed slightly when he entered, and seemed doubtful for a moment how to meet him; but he came forward and kissed her, saying, in his usual calm manner, 'How do you do, my dear?' Mr. Scott shook hands, with his usual easy bearing; but, to be sure, they had met before. Perhaps there might have been a slight degree of constraint over us after papa came in, had not Harry rushed in at this moment, dragging his kite behind him, and precipitated himself upon Harriet, giving her a shower of kisses.

'Are you going away again, Harriet?' he whined, as she put him down to go. 'Where are you going to?'

'I am going away just now, darling,' she said; 'but you will come and see me, won't you?'

‘But I don’t know where you stay!’

‘Oh, Harry! you know Dalmany?’ said she, her face flushing a little, as she stooped to kiss him.

‘And are you going to stay there always?’ pursued Harry, evidently thinking his conversation should be attended to.

Mr. Scott came forward at that moment. He had been talking to papa.

‘Yes,’ said he, answering for her; ‘she is to stay there always; and if you come, Harry, she will show you her horse, and a great large dog, higher than you, and such a beautiful peacock!’

Harry was enchanted, and clapped his hands; but he was not quite satisfied, apparently.

‘But does Harriet stay with you?’ he asked, looking wonderingly at Mr. Scott. ‘Why does she do that?’

‘Oh, come and see her, and ask all the questions then,’ answered he, laughing, as he turned to shake hands with mama.

‘You and Marianne must come up in the beginning of the week to see me,’ Harriet said to me, as she took leave. ‘I shall be very angry if you don’t,—remember.’

There was small danger of our forgetting.

‘Mama and papa must not come to call,’ she added; ‘they must come to dinner. Of course we shall be very quiet for some time,’ and she glanced at her mourning; ‘but I know mama likes that best.’

As they went down-stairs Harriet’s quick eyes caught a vision of Nurse hiding herself in a corner, to catch a view of them as they passed.

‘Oh, Nurse,’ she called, ‘you may as well come out; we see you quite well.’ And poor Nurse (who had been acting on the ostrich plan of keeping her head well out of sight, forgetting that her ample merino skirts came rather prominently forward) was compelled to vacate her hiding-place and come forth, blushing like a peony. For grieved am I to say that Nurse was a regular worshipper of Mammon; and the ‘carriage’ and the ‘flunkies’ had struck awe into her



inmost soul. Harriet greeted her gaily, as she took her hand warmly in hers.

‘Well, Nurse, I suppose you thought a judgment would fall on me for running away? But it hasn’t you see—it hasn’t.’

Nurse looked delighted at the bride’s spirits.

‘Eh, Miss Harrit,—Mrs. Scott, I’m meanin’,—I’m sure ye’re lookin’ jist beautiful,—an’ sae happy tae,’ she added, regarding her with genuine admiration. ‘I’m sure I hope it’ll jist last for ever.’

‘I hope so,’ Mr. Scott said, smiling, as he also shook hands with her; and papa led Harriet to the carriage.

‘I’m sure it’s jist a providence that’s brocht a’ this honour an’ glory to Miss Harrit,’ said Nurse, quite forgetting her ‘manners,’ as she stood at the door, beside papa and me, looking after them. ‘To think o’ that braw carriage bein’ a’ her ain! an’ a’ thae men at her beck an’ ca’!—it’s jist a pleeshure to think o’t.’

‘Well, isn’t Harriet looking lovely? and so beautifully dressed!’ Marianne exclaimed, when I went back to the drawing-room; ‘and hasn’t she got a charming husband? I don’t wonder at all at her falling in love with him. Are you pleased now, mama?’ she gaily asked.

‘Well, dear, I think we have every reason to be pleased, at least as far as we can judge at present,’ was mama’s cautious answer. ‘They appear to be very happy together, and he seems disposed to be friendly with his wife’s family.’

(Certainly they had made a better hand of it than I had expected. Both of them had braved it out well.)

‘Oh, they are very happy,’ said papa, coming in at this moment, and walking up and down the room, looking exceedingly well pleased. ‘He is very proud of her, too,’ he added, smiling. ‘She was talking and laughing all the way downstairs,—even after she was in the carriage,—and I said to him, as he was stepping in, that she didn’t seem to be tired with her travelling. “Not she,” he said, looking most admiringly at her; “she has spirit enough for anything.”’

‘Well,’ said Tom reflectively, ‘Harriet’s got a swell, certainly ; but he’s a nice sort of fellow for all that ;’ and, having delivered this oracular opinion, Tom retreated to his own domain. Never discomposed was Tom by any event that might occur ; his philosophy certainly was enviable.

Many were the glances directed towards Mr. and Mrs. Scott next day in church ; but if the village ladies had expected to feast their eyes on bridal finery they must have been disappointed in the doleful black in which she was arrayed. I did not see them myself, however, as a headache confined me to bed all day ; but I heard all there was to tell from Marianne, who, I could see, was very much of Mr. McCall’s opinion, that ‘sister had fallen on her feet.’

The next few days were wet ; and, as each successive rainy morning showed itself, mama openly lamented that we could not get out, as ‘Harriet would be so dull, poor dear, in that great house by herself.’

‘Then she can drive down beside us here,’ Marianne would answer, ‘or send the carriage to take us there, mama. She can’t be so very dull, or she would do one of them.’

On Thursday, however, we gladly hailed a sunshiny forenoon to pay our visit to Dalmany ; and about noon Marianne and I set forth, as Harriet and I had done some months before, but on a very different errand.

That she was at home we knew, as the old gatekeeper informed us that he ‘had seen her in the park.’ ‘The ledly’ ! It was so odd to hear Harriet called that, and afforded matter for laughing a considerable way up the avenue. How I remembered the last time I had walked in that avenue (so far up at least),—the day Harriet had been introduced to her husband in so unexpected a manner ! and I must say, for myself, that I approached the house this time in more orthodox fashion. Marianne had never been near it before.

The house (or the Castle, as it was usually called) was certainly a great contrast to the old Castle in almost every respect. It was a handsome modern pile of building, with great turreted windows—some of the lower ones, I noticed, being in the

modern bay-fashion, which always, I think, gives a cheerful appearance to a house. The side of the building next us, as we approached, stood out in an open space, in bold relief, without the shade of a single tree ; but the other side was so shadowed with foliage that it was with difficulty a single window could be deciphered. The principal entrance was reached by a flight of broad steps, which were overshadowed by a kind of turreted porch, ornamented on the sloping sides with little figures which I interpreted to represent leopards' heads.

The hall-doors flew open at the sound of the clanging bell. Mrs. Scott was at home ; and we followed the man into a kind of vestibule, and through a long corridor, to a door at the farther end, which he threw open, and ushered us into a spacious and beautiful apartment, lighted by two magnificent bay-windows. He took our names, pulled up a blind or two, and retired.

'What a beautiful room !' exclaimed Marianne involuntarily. 'How hot I look after our long walk !' continued she, glancing into one of the many mirrors that reflected the furniture, statues, etc., that abounded everywhere.

'This a difference from Harriet's little room at home,' said Marianne again, glancing admiringly round.

'I wonder how she will look in it ?' said I.

I had not long to wonder, when a door opened at the farther end of the room, and she appeared, an open book in her hand ; and by her side, walking along on the folds of her sweeping dress, was a pretty little King Charles spaniel, whose white flossy curls and blue eyes contrasted well with its sombre hue. She came forward eagerly, and kissed us affectionately, inquiring for all at home, and why Harry had not come to see the dogs. She took us back with her into her morning-room, which opened off the drawing-room, and which was in every way better suited for a chat than the great drawing-room.

It was rather a small apartment, but elegantly fitted up, and deliciously cool and green, having a large window opening in the French fashion, and descending by a little flight of

steps to the closely-shaven velvet lawn,—leading in turn to a beautiful flower-garden, which seemed formed on a kind of terrace, whence a flight of steps led to the ‘useful gardens’ below.

As she dropped into a low chair opposite the sunny window, where she had evidently been reclining when we disturbed her, Marianne told her she was quite a picture, if not of learned leisure, at least of luxurious ease. But she vigorously defended herself from the charge of idleness, asserting that she had nearly finished her hand-screens (which she had prudently taken with her when she left home), in proof of which she exhibited one which lay on a little work-table near her. She told us her husband was trying to make her a good horsewoman, and that she liked it so much ; and that he said she was a first-rate player at chess. She had not wearied a bit, she added, during the wet days, as she had him all to herself. It was quite charming to see how attached she was to her husband. If ever I had had any doubts on that subject, they were all dispelled now.

‘Have you had any one calling upon you yet?’ Marianne asked.

‘No—you are my very first visitors ; but that is just what should be,’ she said, smiling. ‘They have lost no time yet, May ; you know we only came home on Friday. Sir John called yesterday morning, but he said it was only half a visit without his better half, and that they would come in authorized fashion at the proper time. I don’t know when that is,’ she broke off, with a little laugh.

Her husband seemed to be devoted to her. Not that she said so, of course, but it came out in every way. He had wished her to have a French maid, she told us ; but she did not like foreigners, and had got an English one—such a nice girl ! She took us to see her rooms, which had been hastily fitted up for her, but were very pretty ; and her conservatory, opening off the library, where we were enthusiastically admiring the variegated beauties of the trees and plants when the bell rang for luncheon. Harriet led the way into the

dining-room, also a spacious apartment, with great long windows looking out on the park ; and we were in the midst of another nice long talk at table when a barking of dogs and commotion outside interrupted us, and presently the master of the house, and one or two of his friends, entered in shooting-costume.

Mr. Scott welcomed us most cordially, while the others—Colonel Elphinstone and Major Hayes—saluted Harriet. I admired Harriet, as she did the honours naturally and easily, as if she had been born to the position, her beautiful face animated and sparkling as she laughed and chatted with Major Hayes. Her husband admired her, at all events. I saw that by his eyes, which every now and then wandered to the top of the table ; but I liked to see that. Marianne looked well too, in her pretty white bonnet and blue silk, and quite at her ease. She was the opposite of me, as she always appeared to advantage in company, having her wits always about her and saying nice pretty little things in a nice pretty little way ; whereas I never could come out at all in that way. I could encounter one or two with whom I felt at home with ease ; but any little fluency I possessed was sure to effervesce in general company.

After luncheon we strolled out to the gardens, Harriet and Marianne walking on with the two gentlemen ; and Mr. Scott, who had held open the little wire-gate that led into the flower-garden, followed with me.

‘I hope you think I have taken good care of your sister, Miss Helen ?’ he said, no doubt as much at a loss for conversation as I was.

I laughed. ‘She thinks so, at any rate ; she seems to have enjoyed her little tour very much.’

‘Oh, we had no tour,’ said he. ‘But for the circumstances, we should have gone abroad probably for the winter. In fact, I had some thoughts of doing so still ; but Mrs. Scott, I see, would prefer not—at least at present.’

I was glad. I should have been sorry if they had gone, and said so.

At this moment the party in advance came to a stand-still, discussing the merits of a flower-bed, and Mr. Scott was called forward to give his opinion; and, in the discussion that followed, as to whether it should be oval or square, I strolled away to a little distance, to look at a shrub that attracted my attention.

I was examining it with interest when Colonel Elphinstone sauntered up, not exactly with his hands in his pockets, but with a certain careless ease that corresponded with that attitude. He had already made a languid recognition of me at luncheon, but had seemed too fatigued to do more. He had now, however, rallied his forces, and when I saw him coming I rallied mine. He came and stood. His eye, with its unfailing adjunct, took in me and the shrub; and if I resembled any of the lower animals in particular at that moment, it must have been a porcupine, for I felt myself bristle all over.

‘Aw——,’ he began, ‘I hope you were none the worthe of your fatiguing dutieth the other day?’

I reassured Colonel Elphinstone on that score.

‘Mithtreth Thcott bearth her honourth well,’ was the next observation, apparently meant to be propitiatory.

‘She always looked well,’ I said.

‘Yeth,’ continued he slowly, as if endeavouring to recall her idea in former days; ‘but, you know, a gem ith alwayth improved by a fine thetting.’

‘I don’t know,’ I answered quietly, though inwardly fuming. ‘I think it needless to gild a diamond.’

‘Aw——, aw——, well, thertainly, if you think tho’ (plainly implying he didn’t).

A pause ensued, during which Colonel Elphinstone seemed ruminating. Then, as if a recollection had flashed upon him,—

‘Thurely I have met with you thomewhere before,’ said he suddenly. ‘Oh, it wath at Woodlandth,—it returnth to me.’

I neither aided nor abetted Colonel Elphinstone in his recollections, but bent over the flowers. He went on,—

'Aw——, now that I have recollected, you are addicted to cutting your friendth thometimeth, are you not?'

'Certainly never my *friends*, Colonel Elphinstone,' said I, with emphasis.

'Aw——, but I rather think you cut me that evening, if I recollect aright?'

His mentioning this circumstance implied his utter indifference on the subject, and I felt indignant.

'I rather think you never aspired to the honour of being a friend of mine, Colonel Elphinstone,' I said. 'If my memory serves me, you seemed inclined to quarrel with your friend Mr. Scott for having tried to make us so.'

A prolonged stare was the result of this, and for several seconds he seemed puzzling something out in his own mind, evidently as to whether I could have overheard his remarks or not. Then out came the most extraordinary reply I had ever heard from any lips—evidently on the spur of the moment, and with a look that made the application,—

'Aw——, I wathn't mythelf that evening. You mutht excuthe me.' (Colonel Elphinstone, reader, did himself foul wrong in this. He had been as much 'himself' that evening as he was this morning. In fact, with all his faults, he was too thoroughly a gentleman to have been anything else.)

The excuse, I thought, was a great deal worse than the fault, and I drew myself up; but the next moment, struck with the ridiculousness of the apology, I laughed outright.

If anything so fashionable as Colonel Elphinstone could have looked discomfited, he did at that moment; and just then the rest of the party came up.

'Are you giving or taking a botanical lesson there, Elphinstone?' called out Mr. Scott.

'I wath giving one,' said that gentleman, with perfect gravity, as he sauntered away, leaving me perfectly appalled at the enormity of his wickedness.

Of course I said nothing to Harriet; but afterwards, as Marianne and I were walking homewards, Colonel Elphinstone's eccentricities afforded us a great amount of merriment.

‘I can’t imagine how Lady Charlotte can bring herself to marry that man,’ said Marianne energetically. ‘He is aristocratic-looking, certainly, and rather good-looking besides ; but such a puppy ! It is most extraordinary.’

‘You never will account for all the fancies people take in their heads,’ said I wisely.

‘Oh, every one knows why he is taking her—for her fortune. The Elphinstones, with all their pedigree, are as poor as church mice. But how she, with her beauty and her fortune, can take *him*, is the extraordinary thing—only, to be sure, she is not very bright herself ; and tastes differ, Ellie.’

We turned out of our way a little to call at the farmhouse, and give aunt a message from Harriet, that she hoped they would come and see her before they returned to town, which would be in a week now ; and it was just the dinner-hour when we reached home.

It seemed to be a day of events, as, before we had finished tea, an incident happened which, as Marianne remarked, had not occurred for time immemorial ; and, just as we chanced to be speaking about him, Dr. Blackburn walked in. It was so strange and pleasant to see him there, taking tea with us again, as if he had never been away ; and he seemed to be as pleased as we. Papa, who had never ceased wondering why the Doctor had been such a stranger (even privately expressing his conviction to mama that it was in some way connected with Harriet), was delighted to see him back again, and, wonderful for him, never once that evening thought of his beloved desk, but spent the whole of it amongst us in the parlour, entertaining and being entertained. Marianne and I studiously avoided mentioning that we had been at Dalmany that day, or, indeed, making any allusion to Harriet in any way, till Dr. Blackburn mentioned her himself, saying ‘that he saw Mr. and Mrs. Scott had come home—he had seen them in church.’ More than one pair of eyes glanced at him as he said this ; but, as Marianne afterwards observed, ‘his command of countenance was enviable.’ It was a delightful evening that, altogether.





## CHAPTER XVIII.

### SUNSHINE.

‘When I think on your truth, I doubt you no more ;  
I blame all the fears I gave way to before,  
I say to my heart, “Be at rest, and believe  
That when once it has chosen, it never will leave.”’



AND so the days ran on, and October had set in, with its clear blue skies and frosty nights. Harvest operations were nearly over, but sporting ditto seemed only now to have begun in earnest ; and morning, noon, and night we were kept alive, and the neighbourhood resounded, with dogs barking and guns firing, while sportsmen careered about in all directions.

The neighbouring families had all called at Dalmany. The Elphinstones came among the number, and they had also invited the young couple to a quiet dinner. But this was the extent of their friendship ; anything like cordiality was not to be looked for from them,—it was not in their nature, and in the circumstances it was still less likely. It did not seem to put Harriet much about, however—which was fortunate. If it had been myself, I would have made ceaseless efforts to conciliate my new connections ; and Marianne would have taken their coldness terribly to heart ; but not so Harriet. She said to me one day, in speaking of this,—

‘You know, Ellie, it would be pleasanter, of course, if Mr. Scott’s relations were friendly ; but if they don’t like me I can’t help it ; and he is quite indifferent about it, fortunately. But I excuse a great deal to Miss Elphinstone, as every one knows she was terribly disappointed at Reginald’s marriage ; and it was quite natural, you know, as it would have been a

very good settlement for her, and she was very much attached to him besides.' And, of course, feeling like this, she acted accordingly.

She really became her position well. The fair jewel was worthy of the casket in which it had been placed. We heard from various sources how much she was admired by all Mr. Scott's friends, and that she was winning golden opinions from every one. Lady Maitland also told mama that the Countess of Penrith, a great critic and leader of fashion, had pronounced her 'perfect,' and predicted that she would make a sensation when presented at Court. (I hope I may be pardoned for this little ebullition of vanity, as it is not our own opinion I am stating.) We had been up at Dalmany two or three times since that first visit,—mama and papa also ;—and her own prediction was happily fulfilled : 'they had quite come round when they saw her so happy.'

For the benefit of the curious, I ought also to state here that Mr. Scott's wedding-gift to me was a magnificent bracelet of gold, set with twelve superb diamonds ; and to Marianne, one equally splendid, of gold and emeralds ; while to mama he presented a shawl of costly lace and a diamond brooch, which she could hardly be persuaded to wear, as she said 'it was far too fine for a clergyman's wife.' Also, that the 'postponed rejoicings on the auspicious occasion' had been duly celebrated, in the form of a monster entertainment in the Dalmany grounds, to which the entire neighbourhood was invited. Mr. Scott had not shown himself wanting in all needful liberality.

Of course, at present, parties for 'the young people' were out of the question ; but Sir John and Lady Maitland gave a quiet little dinner in their honour, to which mama and papa and we were also invited. Reunions at Sir John's were always pleasant ; and Marianne was rather disappointed, when the day came, that a severe cold prevented her accompanying us.

'You will tell me all about it when you come back, Ellie,' she said, as the Woodlands carriage drove to the door, and I, arrayed in my bride's maid's silk and my splendid bracelet, followed mama into it.

It was a larger party than we had expected, and included the Elphinstones, the Craufurds, Dr. Blackburn, and several others,—the presence of the first-named probably accounting for the slight degree of formality, rather unusual at Sir John's, that seemed to prevail. I glanced at Miss Elphinstone when Mr. and Mrs. Scott were announced a few minutes after us, and noticed a perceptible toss of the head and a slight increase of colour. However, she greeted them with perfect propriety ; and, as Harriet and she happened to be sitting near each other, one or two polite nothings were interchanged between them.

Harriet was in white silk, with deep flounces of black lace and black trimmings, with jet ornaments, and looked as she always looked—lovely. Miss Elphinstone, was of course, in deep black, and looked very distinguished. She and Harriet were the belles of the room by a long way ; but Harriet ‘ bore the bell,’ *I* thought, at least.

As I was not near any one to whom I might speak, I amused myself watching the company assemble, wondering in what order we would go down to dinner, and who would fall to my lot. It was too much to expect I would get the very person I wished, but still I might get a tolerable companion, and I tried to guess. Dr. Blackburn was standing by old Mrs. Craufurd, and I soon saw he was predestined for her. Sir John had come forward to Harriet, and was talking to her now ; while a youth—name unknown—evidently had designs on Miss Elphinstone. (Miss Craufurd told me afterwards that he would by and by come into a large estate in the neighbouring county ; but as this was not written on his forehead I could not know it, of course.) Colonel Elphinstone had sauntered up to my chair, and a horrible idea dawned upon me that he had been allotted to me. How on earth was I to support a conversation with him during the endless courses of a dinner-party ? He had just performed his bow, and was slowly recovering from it, when dinner was announced, and—I was not mistaken—Colonel Elphinstone presented his arm to me !

I suppose we got down-stairs, but I don't remember how, as

I was wondering, somewhat indignantly, whether he had come willingly this time,—choice, of course, he had none; and it was with a feeling of security, on *one* side at least, that I found myself seated at table between him and Dr. Blackburn.

I was resolved that Colonel Elphinstone should open the conversation, at all events; and it depended very much on what he said, how I seconded him. But apparently it was too much for him to do two things at once, as he made no effort at conversation till the soup was removed, and I had time to exchange salutations with Dr. Blackburn before he vouchsafed a word.

‘Aw——, may I athk if you intend to continue your botanical lethonth, whith Thecott interrupted the other day?’ was his opening question.

I thought this extremely audacious.

‘Before I answer that,’ I said, ‘I must be perfectly assured as to the identity of the person I address.’

He thought for a minute, with a look of mystification (of course assumed). Then, as ‘it returned’ to him,—

‘Aw——, I thee,’ he exclaimed, his face resuming its intelligence. ‘That ith very hard upon a fellow, Mith Fitth-Jameth.’

Dr. Blackburn’s partner having bestowed her regards for a time on an old Indian officer at her other side, he was now listening to our conversation. This was more than I had bargained for. I hoped he would not think me rude, but I thought the Colonel deserved an answer.

‘Colonel Elphinstone,’ I said laughingly, ‘there is one lesson that I am going to give you, but it is not botanical—one you must have learned in your nursery days;’ and I stopped.

‘What ith it?’ said he, all attention.

‘Only this (not a very elegant quotation, you will perhaps think), “He that tells one (white) lie at first, and lies to hide it, makes it two.”’ I did hope no one heard.

He took me up at once.

‘Aw——, well, I uthed to believe in that little man long ago; but, of courthe, I have got patht all that now.’

'Oh, then, Colonel Elphinstone, no wonder that people have ceased to believe in you.'

'Aw——, Mith Fitth-Jameth, you're tho thharpe, it'th cruel to a fellow. But I wath about to thay that thince thothe daythe I have chanthed upon a greater oracle,—one of thothe old Thpartan fellowth, you know, who not only allowth, but recommendth, thothe little excurthionth, on occathion.'

'When it would be rude to speak the truth, perhaps?' said I, laughing; 'but now that our apologies are made, suppose we forget the subject. We are quite mystifying the Doctor.'

'Thertainly, if you wish it,' said he politely; and bestowing his attention for a moment on the business in hand, I had time to turn to Dr. Blackburn.

'Ah,' said he, smiling, 'I have been endeavouring for the last five minutes to profit by your sage counsels, Miss Helen, but it is rather difficult to apply them.'

'I daresay you think so,' said I, laughing, and resolving to enlighten him afterwards.

He had no opportunity of saying more to me, as Colonel Elphinstone again returned to the charge, and kept up a perpetual stream of talk during all the intervals of dinner. I was a little annoyed at this, yet I could not help feeling amused at the originality of his remarks. I soon saw that he did not want intellect, and that his affectation and puppyism (which seemed now to have become part of his nature) did him gross injustice. There were worse people in the world than Colonel Elphinstone. I saw Mr. Scott looking in our direction once or twice during dinner; but whether he heard our conversation, or what he thought of it, I did not know, any more than what Dr. Blackburn thought.

The dinner passed pleasantly enough, and I was almost sorry when we rose to return to the drawing-room, which certainly required all Lady Maitland's smiles, seconded by the brightening influence of a splendid fire, to make it tolerable.

Lady Elphinstone was haughty and formal, Miss Elphinstone coldly polite; and although mama and Lady Maitland

and Harriet kept up a pretty animated conversation, and the Misses Craufurd and I tried over songs at the piano, the atmosphere, as Miss Craufurd laughingly remarked to me, was decidedly colder than was usual at Woodlands. Coffee produced a slight diversion, and the entrance of the gentlemen a few minutes afterwards a great one. I left the piano, and took another seat; and Dr. Blackburn, entering one of the first, crossed over to my sofa and sat down beside me.

‘You have scarcely spoken to me all the evening, Miss Helen,’ he said.

‘You have not spoken to me,’ I answered, colouring a little, perhaps, for the tone seemed one of complaint.

‘Well, that would have been difficult,’ said he, with a smile, ‘considering that neither during dinner, nor after it, was there the smallest opening for me to put in a word.’

‘It was not my fault, I assure you, Dr. Blackburn,’ I said earnestly—a little glad, strange though it was, that he seemed disappointed.

‘Well, we must make up for it now,’ he said. ‘What have you been about for the last fortnight? I have only seen you once.’

‘Oh, I have been busy. I have been at Dalmany, and’—I stopped, remembering that I did not mean to utter the word to him. At the same moment Harriet passed, looking radiant, on Sir John’s arm, as he led her to the piano, arranged her opera-cloak round her, and stood turning over the leaves as she sang a beautiful Italian air with her husband, which he was very fond of.

Dr. Blackburn looked at me with a smile.

‘It is quite delightful to see such felicity,’ he said.

Not the shadow of a shade at that moment lurked in the eyes that met mine, but a language was in them that made me suddenly avert my own, and sent a rush of happy feelings to my heart. Could it be, indeed, that *I* was taking Harriet’s place in his regard—that I had done so already?

‘Your sister and Mr. Scott suit each other well,’ he

observed, breaking the silence. 'They seem very happy together;' and he glanced towards them again.

'Yes,' I said, following his glance, 'I think they are very happy.'

'And have you been writing of late?' he went on, as he put the sugar and cream into my cup, and supplied it with tea. 'Never mind; nobody heard' (in laughing response to my glance, as the man passed on with his tray). 'Any more poems of late?'

'Dr. Blackburn, it is a shame always to laugh at me,' I said, laughing also, however. 'But I have been a great deal better employed than you think. I have been doing feats in the housekeeping line this week. Only ask Nurse, and she will give me a character'—

I had certainly no intention of breaking down when I commenced this speech; but at the last words it struck me all at once what a ridiculous thing that was to say to *him*, and I stopped short, with a sudden exclamation about the heat of the room.

Dr. Blackburn looked at me rather mischievously.

'I feel very comfortable,' he said; 'but, Miss Helen, you have no need to be ashamed of your housekeeping accomplishments. I know of one house, at least, where such talents would be invaluable, and where they will be required one day—*requested*, at all events.'

I felt thoroughly ashamed of blushing in reply to this speech. It was really most annoying that I should always look like a fool before him; but it was his fault, after all. It really was too bad of Dr. Blackburn!

At this moment the butler entered, apparently in search of some one. He came up to Dr. Blackburn, and said something to him in a low tone, of which I only caught the words 'accident,' 'messenger in haste.' Dr. Blackburn drank off his tea, and, giving his cup to the man, turned to me.

'An accident has happened at the railway,' he said, 'and I must go. I had hoped for a pleasant evening; but we doctors, you see, Miss Helen, belong to the public, and cannot always

consult our own feelings.' And hastily making his adieux to Lady Maitland, he left the room.

Would his 'feeling' have been to remain? I thought so. I did not care much for the party after that, I must confess, although it certainly was no fault of Colonel Elphinstone's, who was more than 'dethently thivil,' asked me to sing, turned over the leaves for me, and finally reached a climax by asking if he might 'thee me to my carriage,' which he did, took a most polite leave of papa and mama, and hoped I would not 'thuffer from my exertlionth.'

Colonel Elphinstone's assiduities to me had apparently struck others as well as myself with surprise, as Harriet told me the next day that 'Reginald had laughed for an hour last night at the idea of two such opposites having met;' and that he had said 'I was quite able for him.'

'But take care, Ellie,' she added, laughing; 'Lady Charlotte would have been in a pretty way if she had seen you last night. She keeps a pretty strict guard over her *fiancé*; and we would be having somebody else jealous too, if Colonel Elphinstone and you were to take any—any fancies for each other into your most wise and sapient heads; and that would never do.'

'*Je n'en vois pas la nécessité*,' I said, laughing in good earnest at the idea. 'We are the very antipodes of each other, Colonel Elphinstone and I, in everything.'

'The very reason why you may some day meet,' Harriet said, still laughing. 'You are rather smart, you know, Ellie—there is no denying that; and he is so indolent and lazy, that it would be the very thing for both of you. Reginald asked him if his dinner-table talk had not been too much for him, and he answered, "Aw——, well, the ith perhapth rather fatht in her ideath, but the'th a *clever* girl." (You should hear Reginald give it with all the graces.) And I can tell you, Ellie, that is no small compliment from Colonel Elphinstone.'

Perhaps it was; but although I did not 'thuffer from my effortth,' I had certainly no ambition to repeat them.





## CHAPTER XIX.

### ANOTHER EVENT.

' Somebody's courting somebody,  
Somewhere or other to-night ;  
Somebody's whispering to somebody,  
Under the pale moonlight.'



AYS, weeks, and even months, passed on. Autumn had given place to winter, and now it was the first month of spring. Mr. and Mrs. Scott had been abroad during the earlier part of the winter. Mrs. Scott's objection to travelling seemed at last to have been obviated, as they had left Dalmany rather suddenly about the end of October (just after Lady Maitland's bazaar, which went off splendidly, and at which Mr. Scott more than fulfilled his promise, by making most liberal purchases). They spent the intervening months at Paris and Rome, and only returned about the beginning of February.

The mourning at Dalmany was over now, outwardly, at least. If they had been 'quiet' for a time, they made ample amends for it now ; as Tom said, 'they were going the pace.' They had been only one week at home ; but already their house was filled with visitors, and parties and amusements of every kind were the order of the day.

We had been up once or twice of an evening, though not so often as Harriet wished ; but mama did not like so much dissipation for us, and most of the visitors were strangers to us. My *quondam* foe, Colonel Elphinstone, was a constant visitor there. He had always been the most cordial of his family to Harriet, and was now on most cousinly terms with

her. She affirmed that she really liked him ; and I had found out also, since the day of the memorable 'botanical lesson,' that there really were worse people than Colonel Elphinstone.

Everything seemed gay and prosperous at Dalmany House, contrasting vividly with the smothered discontent and dissatisfaction that had arisen, and had begun to ferment into something stronger, amongst the tenantry and work-people on the estate. As I had predicted, Mr. Morton's goodness had passed away like the morning cloud. He had once more resumed his old tyranny over them, and, as Robbie Gourlay expressed it, seemed to be 'raythur the waur for his fit o' guidness ;' and openly expressed murmurs against Mr. Scott for persisting in retaining such a factotum had reached us many times during those months. He discharged workmen for any or every reason, or for no reason at all, the chief perhaps being a true Scotch disinclination to be constrained to attend 'his chapel,' as it was universally called (which was with him a *sine quâ non* now in all his subordinates), more especially as Mr. Charteris had gradually become 'higher' and 'higher' in his Church views ; and all the practices carried on there were now virtually Popish.

Even the farmers were subjected to endless annoyances from the same source ; and one or two time-honoured tenants whose leases had nearly expired received notice (without any reason assigned) that they would not be renewed. Sir John Maitland, Colonel Craufurd, and other gentlemen in the neighbourhood, openly expressed their astonishment that Mr. Scott should permit such doings ; and all the parish united in the unanimous verdict that, 'Now Morton had lifted his heid sae high, he wad ne'er pit it doon again ; sic vermin maun jist be soopit clean oot o' the land, an' it was high time the Laird was hame to do it.'

But the Laird had come home ; and this was how he was fulfilling their expectations, only amusing himself, and letting everything else go. I ventured to remark to Harriet one day that I wondered Mr. Scott did not dismiss Mr. Morton at once, when he was so evidently unpopular with every one, and, in

fact, doing mischief. I did it once, but I never did so again, as Harriet seemed annoyed, and stopped me short, saying that she knew nothing whatever about Mr. Scott's business affairs,—she never interfered.

I thought she might have tried to interfere a little in a matter like this ; but, of course, she knew her own affairs best. Papa, too, had spoken to Mr. Scott himself on the subject, and had been answered that 'he would look into it.' But as yet nothing had been done ; and Mr. Morton continued to live and flourish like a green bay-tree,—and Mr. Charteris also. I ought also to state here that Mr. and Mrs. Scott, since their return, had discontinued their regular twice-a-day attendance at the parish church, and belonged altogether to the chapel, to Nurse and Robbie's great scandal, that they should so far have strayed from the right way, and to our deep and heartfelt sorrow.

'I am disappointed in that lad more than words can tell,' papa said one day, in speaking of these matters. 'He began so well,—what infatuation can have seized him ? Those are not like nineteenth century doings at all.'

'It is the true spirit of Popery, however,' mama said, with a sigh of regret,—'always tyrannical, ever grasping at supreme power, and utterly subversive of all liberty. He must be a Papist at heart himself,—no doubt of that,—and must only have been acting a part formerly, for the sake of getting Harriet.'

'I cannot quite bring myself to think that of him yet,' papa said sadly ; 'he seemed so ingenuous, and so genuine,—and seems so yet. I cannot tell what to think.'

'I wish it could be dinged doon, an' the place harried,' was Robbie's worst anathema against the chapel. But in the meantime chapel and priest continued to prosper, and more so now than ever.

As I said before, gay days were those at Dalmany. Harriet was happy, at all events—that was clear : no cloud seemed as yet to have ever dimmed her full-orbed brightness ; but I thought Mr. Scott's face wore a shade sometimes that I had

not noticed there before, as if, like every one else, the cares of life had begun to harass him. But he certainly was a most devoted husband, and he was all in all to Harriet. She was improved, too, in many respects; so gentle and thoughtful she had become in her new happiness! and her always beautiful face wore a soft and happy expression, far sweeter than any her girlhood could boast. This marriage, that we had all been so afraid of, seemed, in that respect at least, to have turned out most happily.

But if care had cast its shadow over Mr. Scott, it seemed to have been completely lifted from Dr. Blackburn. As Marianne remarked, he was a different man altogether from what she had ever seen him before, and she had known him longer than I had. She had no hesitation now in saying that it was I who had wrought the change; and Nurse was already busy in speculations on my account.

‘Eh, Miss Heelen,’ she would say, ‘it’s weel seen noo wha the Doctor comes here for; an’ I’m sure it’s a rael nice hoose ye’re gettin’, an’ the best o’ men’—reaching the climax, however, by asking me one day ‘if I would keep on Jenny?’ adding, ‘for I’m dootin’ she’ll fash ye, Miss Heelen. Ye see, she’s had her ain way that lang, she’ll no’ tak weel wi’ a mistress.’

‘Oh, Nurse, hush!’ I said, laughing, as it was just as well to do; ‘what would Jenny say if she heard you?’

‘Deed Jenny kens jist as weel as me—the haill pairish kens’t. Jenny pat it to the Doctor hissle’ ae day, “whan Miss Heelen was comin’ ower?” but he jist lauched—but he ne’er said “No.”’

‘And I am sure he never said “Yes,” Nurse, I said. ‘The parish and you know a great deal more than I do; and really you mustn’t say these things, Nurse,’ I added, trying to look grave, ‘or you and I will quarrel,—and that would never do.’

Swiftly for me had those months passed, while the parish had gossiped, and Nurse had talked, and Marianne had teased. The smile of summer had spread itself over the winter days; since *his* restored friendship, a new existence had dawned upon

me ; and so happy did I feel that I scarcely even wished for change. Once, indeed, I had stretched out my hands, eager and longing for it, but it came not ; now, happy and contented, basking each day in sunny glades, and resting by limpid waters, I looked not, wished not, for it,—and it came !

It came, but not as I had looked for it ; what ever does happen as we expect?—even those things most sure to come.

It was the tenth day of February, that ‘day’ of my life ! I had been at Dalmany, and had stayed to luncheon, but had left Harriet hurriedly, as dusk was coming on, and I had some work to hand in from mama to Widow Thompson, an old woman at Colmuir End. I had just left the cottage, after having delivered the message, and was hurrying home, when footsteps I knew well came up behind me.

‘Going home, Miss Helen?’ said a familiar voice ; ‘shall I have the pleasure of taking charge of you?’ and, without waiting for an answer, he quietly took my hand and drew it through his arm. He had often done so before, but to-night, somehow, there was a difference—I could not tell what, but I felt it.

‘I am so glad to see you, Dr. Blackburn,’ I began, though, to say the truth, I did not very well know what politeness I was uttering. ‘It is getting quite dark ; I had no idea it was so late.’

‘I am very glad too.’

I wondered he should have nothing else to say to me than that, for topics did not usually fail between us. I tried the first subjects that presented themselves,—Harriet, Widow Thompson, whom I had just left,—anything that came first ; but he gave me short replies, and we gradually fell into silence.

We had walked thus till we had come in sight of his own house, standing quietly on its green lawn, on which a stream of light poured from one of the lower windows, probably Jenny’s domain. Then he spoke.

‘Helen,’ he began, in a hurried tone, ‘if I had not met you I was coming to-night to see you ; I wish to ask you a question ; I have waited long—and now’—

Involuntarily I drew away my hand, but he caught it again in his.

‘You must hear my question, Helen: I am very lonely in that house of mine. Helen, will you come?’

Come! Yes; had he pitched his tent in the Great Desert, and called across the ocean for me to follow him, I would have gone; and counted home, and friends, and country—all, as nothing! Plenty of words were in my heart to this effect, but none would come till he spoke again.

‘Helen, will you come home?’

And I said I would!

By this time we had come to the foot of the Manse brae; but we walked on, up the Kinleith Road, where we would meet no one; and I told him all,—all my long-pent-up feelings—all my doubts, and hopes, and fears—including Harriet, poor dear girl! and how jealous I had been of her,—to have them all soothed—and—and—kissed away.

He seemed perfectly astonished to hear my belief so long cherished in regard to Harriet, and reassured me completely as to that—that a thought of her, in that way, had never entered his head. He had admired her, of course, as he could not fail to admire one so lovely; but that he had loved me, and me only, and that almost from the first time we had met. But he had a little circumstance regarding himself which he wished to tell me, he said, but he would not do it to-night—he would write. We walked up and down, up and down the Kinleith Road, till I suddenly remembered that not only dinner at home, but tea, would long be past.

‘Oh, what will they think has become of me?’ cried I, in consternation; ‘and what shall I say?’

‘Say you were with me, you little goose,’ said he, laughing. ‘Are you ashamed of me already, Ellie?’

‘Not very likely,’ I said proudly, clasping his arm, and we turned homewards. Oh, was there any one in all this world as happy as I?

As we were nearing the gate, he told me, smiling, that he would come to-morrow, and ask me from papa.

'And if he won't give you to me, Ellie?'

'Then I will tell him that I will never, never be happy again, all my life,' cried I vehemently. 'But there is no fear of that; he likes you better than any one'—

'You do, Ellie, perhaps; but you can't answer for him, I am afraid. But now I will bid you good-night, before the door opens.'

He stooped and kissed me several times. 'Good-night, darling.' He was in the act of going, when the door opened (quicker than usual, *surely*), and disclosed Marianne coming down-stairs. She caught sight of Dr. Blackburn, and came forward.

'You are not going away, Dr. Blackburn?' she said. 'You will come in and have tea with us—we have not had it yet.'

He looked at me.

'I will just go in to-night, Ellie,' he whispered; and, asking if papa were in, he followed her to the study.

I ran up-stairs into my own room, and there, with my things still on, knelt down by the window, in the dark, and poured out my whole heart in loving thanksgiving to my heavenly Father for this unutterable happiness He had bestowed on me, supplicating His blessing upon our engagement, and upon our whole future life, and committing both myself and my beloved one, with all our interests, and all dear to us, wholly into His loving hands. Then I sat down at the window—oh, so happy!—and tried to think over all that had occurred.

I sat at the window with my things on till Marianne came in to see why I was not coming down. Surely she must have suspected something, seeing me still sitting in my hat and jacket, and in the dark.

'Have you been all this time at Dalmany, Ellie?' she asked.

I had to think before I answered. Dalmany and its inhabitants seemed very far off at this moment.

'No, not quite all the time,' I said.

'And where did you meet Dr. Blackburn?' she went on.

'I met him near Colmuir End.

Then she reached the climax.

‘What does he want just now with papa, Ellie?’

‘I will tell you when he is away, dear.’

‘Oh, Ellie!’ she said suddenly, with a kind of half cry; ‘he doesn’t want you, does he?’

I drew her forward, and leaned my head against her. It was dark, and I could speak—and I told her.

‘Oh, Ellie dear, I’m so glad!’ she said, kissing me; ‘but so sorry too,—my last sister! What am I to do without you?’

‘I’m not going far away,’ I whispered, as I kissed away the tear that rested on her cheek. ‘I shall see you every day.’

‘I told you both Harriet and you would be away before me. Well, well,—it’s what we must all come to, I suppose;’ and, consoling herself with this practical consideration, she began to take off my things.

By and by we heard him go, and Marianne went down-stairs to make tea. When I followed a few minutes afterwards I wished myself up-stairs again, as a glance told me my secret was one no longer. It was really too bad of papa!—though, after all, I think it must have been Marianne; but I have never got to the rights of that yet.

‘Well, Ellie,’ papa said, kissing me when I went in, ‘and so you want to leave us too? I don’t think, really’ (kissing me again), ‘that I would have given you to anybody but the Doctor.’

Mama kissed me too, but the tears were in her eyes, and she did not speak. It was certainly rather formidable, such a public demonstration; but it was better than if they had been angry. Tom, newly out from Edinburgh, made me a horrible grimace as I sat down beside him.

‘You’re not to come near me!—going and liking another man better; you’re just as silly as Harriet and Marianne,’ said he, giving me a pinch as a further proof of his contempt.

Papa said nothing more on the subject, though evidently he was more than pleased; but Marianne was constantly making sly allusions to it, and Tom sarcastic ones (not very ill-natured, though), which I had to take with equanimity; but I was



happy enough to bear anything. It was a happy evening that!

I could not help wondering a little what it was he had to tell me. But, whatever it was, I knew it could make no difference to me. I was his own now, and he loved me.

I was not kept long in suspense, for the next day's post brought me a letter,—my first letter! I carried it to my own room, locked the door, and kissed it many times before I broke the seal. Oh dear, what a surprise it was! I must have begun to read expecting something, of course; but I never guessed at anything like the truth. I read it twice over before I took in its full import.

'My Ellie' (it began),—'for you are mine now, are you not?—before I asked you my question last night I ought to have told you a circumstance about myself, which with some people might have influenced the answer, but not, I think, with you, Ellie. You will not love me the less, I know, because others have slighted and forsaken me. And when you know all, you will not blame me for having kept it from you so long. It is a sad story to have to tell my innocent little love; but you are to be my wife, Ellie, and there must be no secrets between us.

'When you gave me your promise last night, you did not know (you could not) that I had once been the husband of another; but so it was. That other was parted from me by worse than death—she left me. But if you are to hear anything, you must hear all from the beginning.

'You know, I think, that after practising for a year or two in my native town, Inverness, I went to settle in London, with good prospects, as assistant and junior partner to an old medical friend of my uncle's.

'Soon after settling there, in the absence of the old doctor, I was called professionally to attend Lady Jane Scott, an old patient of his, who had come to London for a few weeks for medical advice. In my daily attendance upon her I made the acquaintance of a young girl (or rather, I may say, young lady; for she might easily have passed for such, her beauty and grace were so remarkable), who filled the post of companion to

her ; and who was— But that I will tell you shortly. I did not know it myself till long afterwards.

‘Lady Jane’s illness was not very serious ; but, as she insisted upon it, my medical visits were continued long after her convalescence ; and the acquaintance already mentioned had time to ripen into something warmer than friendship—on my part, at least. I can offer no excuse for myself there, for it was only her beauty that attracted me, as I knew nothing whatever of her mind or disposition. In fact, I had almost never seen her alone ; but a young man of three-and-twenty seldom takes reason for his guide, and I was no exception. Had I at that time been enabled to enjoy as much of her society as I desired, I must soon have discovered my mistake, and no great harm would have been done to either of us. But as it was, in those brief interviews I could only think of her attractions—I had no time to note her deficiencies. And so it went on. My visits were not often paid of an evening ; but once or twice, happening to call at an unwonted hour, I met a gentleman there, who, I soon saw, was a devotee at the same shrine as myself, and who, gifted as he was with far greater attractions in every way than I could boast of, bade fair to be an acceptable suppliant ; though she contrived to bestow her smiles and her attentions pretty equally on us both. Lady Jane, however, with the indifference of old age, remarked nothing of all this, and the acquaintance, as I said, had time to develop under her very eyes.

‘Of course the rivalry above named only riveted my chains ; and I was about to put my fate to the test, to win or lose all, when, on calling at Lady Jane’s with this intent,—the day before the family were to leave town,—I found to my great disappointment that she had quitted her situation some days before ; and her aunt, who belonged to the same household, informed me that it was owing to a disagreement with Lady Jane that her niece had gone away ; that, as she had no relations who could maintain her, she was looking out for another situation, and meantime had gone to visit a friend in the country.

‘This account did not greatly surprise me, as I knew the old lady to be rather irritable, and likely to try the temper of a young companion, and I did not dream of doubting the story in any respect. Nor did I deliberate long before I wrote to her (under cover to her aunt), offering her my hand and the shelter of my home. This was about a fortnight after she had left Lady Jane’s. I waited anxiously for an answer to that letter; but a fortnight passed, and none came, and I was just about to write again, thinking it must have miscarried in some way, when, to my great joy, an answer came, saying she had been ill and unable to write, but was better now, and would be glad to see me the following day. And, on calling at the address indicated,—that of a respectable West End dressmaker,—I found her paler indeed, and more spiritless than I had hitherto seen her, but as attractive in my eyes as ever, and with no other traces of recent illness that I could see in her face.

‘She told me what I had heard before, that she had quitted Lady Jane on account of her temper, adding that, as she had no relations to return to, she was without a home, and was looking out for a situation; but that if I loved her as I had said, and adhered to the proposal I had made, she would gladly accept it. Of course I adhered to it, and we were married immediately. The ceremony was strictly private, as my wife seemed specially to wish, and, as neither of us had any relatives to invite except the aunt already mentioned, and one or two medical friends of my own, there were none present.

‘True, I had my uncle, but (you knew him, Ellie) he was a proud old Highlander, as jealous of his family honour as any far-descended peer of the realm; and you can imagine how unlikely it was that the connection I was about to form would please him. In fact, so great a blow did I know it would prove, that I could not bring myself to break it to him till the deed was actually done beyond recall. When I did, the effect was greater even than I had expected. My own letter was returned to me, accompanied by a single line to the effect that he certainly never would acknowledge as a relative the girl I

had married ; and that I myself, he could foresee, would not be long in repenting the step I had taken.

‘Of course I took this as a mere ebullition of anger—as it was ; but the event proved too surely that he was right. The fact that he never mentioned the circumstance to your father, or any friend he had, of itself proves how deep and incurable the wound had been.

‘I need not trouble you with details, Ellie ; suffice it to say that, during a union of barely two months, I had ample leisure to awake from my delusion. Far from the gentle, loving companion I had pictured, I found her empty, frivolous, vain, and so extravagant that I had more than once, even in those early days, to tell her that she was ruining me ; also, that whatever her motive for marrying me had been, it certainly was not love. (This latter discovery I had made within a very few days.) How long my own love might have endured through all I had not the opportunity of judging.

‘One day, in returning from a professional visit at the West End, and passing through one of the aristocratic streets, I suddenly saw two ladies, one of whom I thought was my wife, entering at the door of one of the central houses. I wondered what she could be doing there, as I knew she had no acquaintances in that locality. But I might have been mistaken ; and after a little I dismissed it from my thoughts.

‘On returning home, some hours afterwards, I found my wife absent, which, however, was nothing unusual, as she seemed to make the most of the few acquaintances she had (chiefly wealthy city people,—whose families I attended professionally,—amongst whom it seemed to be her ambition, or rather, I should say, her sole interest in life, to pose as a *fino lady*), and was very often with them. I had been compelled to remonstrate with her that very morning about the purchase of some costly furniture, which she had persisted in ordering contrary to my express wishes, which remonstrance (gentle as I studied to make it) had been received in sullen silence ; and, hearing from the servant that her aunt had paid her a hurried visit shortly after I had left in the morning, and that they had

gone out together, I concluded that she had been detailing her grievances to her aunt, and had accompanied her out to continue the confidence.

‘But when afternoon and evening passed, and she appeared not, I went out to inquire after her. She had not, however, been at the houses of any of her acquaintances, nor had any one seen her, and I had to return home without satisfaction. I then at once telegraphed to her aunt, asking if her niece had accompanied her home (thinking that in a fit of childish petulance she had intended to punish me thus). But the answer informed me that the person I had telegraphed to (naming her) had quitted Lady Jane’s that day, and that nothing was known of her subsequent movements. This, of course, only increased the mystery. And when the night passed, and still no tidings of her, my first proceeding in the morning was to repair to the house where I was now convinced I had seen them enter, to make inquiry.

‘The house, I learned, belonged to (I will not mention his name) the gentleman I had seen at Lady Jane’s. This was confirmation of the suspicions that had begun to dawn upon me. But, on inquiring for the master of the house, I was informed that he had left town the previous day. The man did not know where he had gone; and, on interrogating him as to whether any lady had called the day before, he admitted that a middle-aged woman and a young person answering the description I gave had come about noon, and had seen his master, but had been shown out again a few minutes afterwards, and they had not returned. This was altogether inexplicable. I at once addressed a letter to the gentleman in question, stating that I understood my wife had called for him the previous day; that I could not understand what her motive could be; and that, as she had never returned home, I should feel obliged if he would let me know what her business with him had been, and if he could give me any clue as to her whereabouts. To this I received a prompt reply, dated from Baden-Baden, and containing a point-blank and haughty denial of any knowledge of Mrs.

Blackburn. This, of course, did not satisfy me; but the denial was so far corroborated, that I ascertained that at least he had gone abroad alone.

‘All inquiries after her, however, in other quarters proved fruitless, and I had to abandon the search. But my suspicions were speedily turned again in the former direction by the accidental discovery, in my wife’s desk, of a scrap of a letter in his handwriting, which, *minus* date or signature as the fragment was, carried strong proof at least of a correspondence between them. This, however, might have been previous to our marriage; and at all events, in face of his denial, I could take no further steps in the matter.

‘I will own to you, Ellie, that in all this the wound to my self-love, if to nothing else, had been severe. I had been deceived (in fact, I now began to suspect that I had been a dupe from the beginning); my affections had been trifled with, my feelings outraged; and you cannot wonder that I felt it deeply, and that, disgusted with London and its associations, I madly, as some would think, abandoned my substantial if not brilliant prospects, and went I cared not whither. For many months I wandered about, seeking to forget, in foreign lands, till I was recalled by what proved to be my uncle’s last illness. On his deathbed he communicated to me some of the surmises that had tended to prejudice him against my wife, but which I will not give to you. Do you guess who she was, Ellie? She was the long-missing daughter of our old friend Gourlay.

‘My uncle, with the kind view, I believe, of once more settling me, had made it his last request that I should take up his practice at Colston; and in thus carrying out his wishes, as well as in the pleasure I soon began to take in those duties themselves, I gradually found a healing balm for my wounds. I met with many kind friends at Colston, and incessant occupation left no leisure for the indulgence of idle grief. Of course I necessarily came frequently in contact with the Gourlay family, and early learned from Mrs. Gourlay’s lips the whole story of the daughter’s disappearance, as well as her

own conjectures thereupon. (They had not known of that disappearance, however, until long after the fact,—after Lady Jane's death, and the consequent breaking up of her household,—as she had never corresponded with them; and it was only accidentally, through an acquaintance having been in the locality about some business, that they learned for the first time that both their daughter and her relative had suddenly left Lady Jane's some months before, and had not since been heard of.) Of her marriage they seemed to have no idea, and I could not enlighten them; as, even had my own feelings suffered me to speak on the matter, I had already been made fully aware (by my uncle and others) of the old man's sensitiveness on the subject; and what a tale it would have been for a father's ears!

‘But, to make a long story short, Ellie, a few months found me settled at Colston as completely as if I had been there for years; and in the discharge of the duties, secular and sacred, I had taken upon me, I found equanimity at least, if not happiness. It is needless to add that during all this time I had heard nothing of my ill-fated wife. I had, however, once again, most unexpectedly come in contact with the gentleman before alluded to, whom I suspected of having a hand in her disappearance (the territorial designation by which alone I had known him was not his only one, it appeared), and had put it to him face to face, “Did he or did he not know aught of her?” The answer was, once again, an unhesitating and flat denial.

‘Then, Ellie (or rather at this same time), you came home, and a new era began for me. There was something about you so different from any other girl I had ever known, that from the first you interested me; then you brightened me; and then, Ellie, before many weeks had passed, I found I loved you as I had never loved another. If I had not known it before, that first evening at Sir John's enlightened me. Then reflection came. How madly, how unjustifiably I had been acting!—that, fettered as I was, I had forgotten I was not free! Then more selfish and bitter thoughts arose out of

these. Here was I, a young man in the prime of life, bound hand and foot by ties that had been virtually broken, and yet that bound me still. For, for me the law had no redress. To obtain that, I must have had proof; and what proof could I bring? There was the bitter drop! What prospect had I of release? One thing was certain,—I must part from you; and one-half of what that parting cost me you can never know. You were very forbearing towards me, my little Ellie; and, though you could not see the effort it cost me to maintain a cold exterior towards you, you never repaid me with answering coldness. Once or twice I could detect your sweet eyes turned wonderingly upon me, as if questioning the cause of my strange demeanour, and I could not explain—not by one word. But the struggle was too great, and I had made up my mind finally to leave Colston, when the fetter that bound me was unexpectedly broken—a power stronger even than the law had come between us. The letter I now enclose to you brought me tidings of my wife's death.

‘And now, Ellie, you know all; and how, the barrier thus removed, I appropriated you once again to myself (for you could not, I am sure, have misunderstood me, from the eventful evening before your sister's marriage), though I would not speak until the old man's term of mourning for his daughter had ended. I have told this to you alone. I would have mentioned it to your father last night; but, as I had not previously acquainted you with it, I considered that you had the first right to know, and leave you to tell your family, in your own time and way. I can but wonder that no hint of the circumstances should have reached you from some quarter long ere this, and can only account for the fact from my having made but few acquaintances in London, and having had small inducement from the first to present my bride to those I had. I will see you in the evening. Meantime, good-bye, my darling.—Yours ever,           WILLIAM BLACKBURN.’

This was the mystery, then! Well, I had never thought of this. It was wonderful that we had never heard of it



before. It did hurt me a little just at first. I grudged any of his love having ever been another's. But, after all, it made no great difference,—he was mine now; and he loved me, and me only. It required no great penetration to see who was the 'gentleman' referred to. I looked back on all the circumstances of the last seven months,—the mystery of that first day, the subsequent evening, and many other little things unnoticed before, rose up and put themselves in form; and, with the light of the letter, I saw the whole as clearly as if he had told me. Ah me! it was my brother-in-law, my sister's husband, who had done this wrong!

I took my resolution. Papa must know, of course; but no need to acquaint any one else with these passages, both for Dr. Blackburn's sake and Harriet's. And there was a doubt after all.

I glanced at the unclosed letter,—an illiterate scrawl from the girl's aunt, sent to his old address in London, and re-directed by the Post Office authorities to his present residence,—stating the fact of her death, six months before, from fever; that she had written at the time, but the ship had foundered, as she had only learned within the last few weeks, and that she now wrote again, to acquaint him with the fact. She added that 'the circumstances under which her niece had left him, and which she declined to enter upon now, rendered it an unpleasant task for her to communicate with him; and that she did so solely on her niece's account—to beg him that if he should ever, in the course of his life, come in contact with any of her friends, he would never mention her name to them, nor any of the circumstances that had come under his notice; as he had been tender of her feelings in life, to spare her memory dead.'

Papa must be told,—that was clear; and better that I should do it than that *he* should have to open up the wound anew; and, seeing mama and Marianne sitting out on the garden-chair, I judged this to be a good opportunity of doing so, and, taking up the letters, I hastened to the study.

'Papa, I wish you to read this,' was all I said, and gave him the letter; and, walking to the window, I stood looking out, and did not turn round for a long time; nor did he.

I heard the paper crackling, as he folded up the letters; then he rose and walked hurriedly up and down the room. At length, after an age, as it seemed to me, he spoke.

'Well, I never would have suspected this,' he said. 'But, after all, it makes no great difference to us. I certainly would have preferred that you had been his first love, Ellie; but I suppose it won't affect your sentiments for him? You are first now, you know,' he added, with a smile.

I returned the smile. 'No, indeed, papa,' I said.

'Then you can tell him so to-night. It is better, perhaps, that I should not refer to it. And no need,' he added, as I was leaving the room, 'for acquainting Marianne or any one with this. I must tell mama, of course, but it need go no further.'

He was very kind, dear papa, and I was glad it was told; but I did wonder, as I returned to my room, whether any suspicions as to the identity of the 'gentleman' had crossed his mind. I did hope it had not. Marianne, I saw, was a little curious as to the thick billet I had received, and wondered what Dr. Blackburn could have to say to me already, and I had some difficulty in evading the subject. I could see she felt a little this first secret that had come between us; but, of course, I could not impart it—it belonged to *us* alone. I felt that my girlishness, with all its confidences and dependence, was gone for ever; and that now I had to think and care for another as well as myself.

And when evening came, and mama told me that Dr. Blackburn was in the drawing-room waiting to see me, and that she had just been with him, I went up-stairs to our first meeting, with only one thought—to be all I could to him.

He only looked at me when I entered; but if his eyes questioned for a moment, they must also have read all; for, without a word, he took me to his arms—my own place now;

and—and—the rest of that evening there is no need I should tell here.

‘He doesn’t want you soon, Ellie dear, I hope?’ mama asked tremulously, when I entered the sitting-room for prayers, after he had gone.

‘He is very lonely, mama,’ was all I said; but from that time it was understood that I was to go home soon.

Nurse’s congratulations on the occasion were characteristic.

‘Eh, Miss Heelen,’ she exclaimed (when Marianne had told her of it), ‘ye’ll can be ill whan ye like, noo ye hae the Doctor to tak’ care o’ ye! An’ I’m no’ thinkin’,’ she added, with what was meant for a knowing look,—‘I’m no’ thinkin’ ye’ll lock him oot again.’

‘I am not a bit astonished,’ said Harriet, when she heard the news. ‘I always said it, you know, Ellie; and do you remember how touchy you used to be on the subject?’

Did I not? But it was not for the reason she supposed





## CHAPTER XX.

### AN UNEXPECTED PROPOSAL.

'Oh, lady, ye'll be clad in silk,  
Wi' diamonds in your hair,  
Gin ye consent to be my bride,  
Nor think on Jamie mair.  
'Oh wha wad wear a silken goon,  
Wi' tears in their e'e?  
An' afore I break my true love's heart,  
I'll lay me doon an' dee.'



NE person there was who did not seem to have 'said it even to himself, and that was my old friend Colonel Elphinstone, whom I had almost forgotten since the eventful day I was last at Dalmany. (Perhaps I ought not to tell it here; but, as circumstances have compelled me to give a full history of this year of my life, so that no one may ever blame me or mine, I have no choice but to do so.)

It was the week after my engagement, and I had accompanied Marianne part of the way to Dalmany, where she was to lunch, to meet some guests of distinction. I had declined the invitation, as I did not care to meet strangers, and, besides, I had an appointment with Dr. Blackburn an hour or two afterwards. I was returning slowly homewards, and, tempted by the beauty of the day, I strolled down by the old Castle, intending to return home—as far as I could, at least—by the water-side. I passed the place where we had gathered ferns the day of Harriet's accident, nearly eight months before; but I was not thinking of Harriet then: my thoughts were with my heart, and that, at this moment, was not in the Dalmany grounds.

I had sat down for a minute or two on a rustic bench, when I saw Colonel Elphinstone, 'his lone,' coming leisurely along towards me. It was not by any means the first time that

Colonel Elphinstone had favoured me with his delightful company in my walks ; nor the 'fourth, nor the fifth,' nor the 'theventh' either, but I had always believed the meeting to be purely accidental—*till* now. I was not particularly delighted to have my meditations broken upon, but there was no help for it. He came forward, and threw himself on the bench beside me.

'Aw——, Mith Helen,' said he, 'meditating by the waterth ? Luncheon won't wait for uth, though, I thuthpect.'

(Colonel Elphinstone had some time ago made the transition to my Christian name.)

'Oh, I am not going to luncheon, Colonel Elphinstone,' I said. 'I declined.'

'Aw——, indeed ! I'm thorry,' said he, looking annoyed. 'I underthtodd you were to be there. I gave up an engagement to come here.'

'But you are in time yet, Colonel Elphinstone,' I said, looking at my watch—Dr. Blackburn's gift.

'Aw——, aw——, let me thee,' taking out his chronometer. 'Your timekeeper muthtn't be the correct thing. Aw——, thuppothe we lunth here, on the beautieth of nature ?'

This was too exalted for me.

'I would prefer something a little more substantial,' I said, laughing.

'Aw——. Now, Mith Helen, why do you alwayth laugh ?' he remonstrated. 'Thome girlth would feel flattered that I thould prefer their thotheity to a party.'

'Lady Charlotte ?' I suggested mischievously.

'Confound Lady Tharlottel !' he exclaimed, with unwonted energy, starting to his feet, and then, after a minute, resuming his lazy attitude again.

I thought this was a strange way for a gentleman to speak of the lady he was going to marry. I also thought it very lazy of Colonel Elphinstone to be lounging there, when it was more than time he ought to have been at the house ; so I said, again looking at my watch, and holding it up to him,—

'Really, Colonel Elphinstone, you *will* be too late if you don't go at once.'

‘Aw——,’ said he languidly, and not disturbing himself a bit, ‘it’th tho fatiguing walking tho far. By the time I reatth the houthe, luntleon would be over ; and, bethidcth,’ said he suddenly, ‘I had rather thtay here bethide you.’

This from Colonel Elphinstone ! I had almost laughed at the remembrance that crossed me just then ; but there was a touch of what he himself would have called ‘thpooneyithm’ in the last words, that stopped me. But I was not going to have this nonsense spoken to me—I, who was to be Dr. Blackburn’s wife in a few weeks. I drew myself up ; but, thinking better of it, the next moment I laughed.

‘Now, Colonel Elphinstone,’ I said, ‘you know you need not try to compliment me, because I know quite well what you think of me. I have not forgotten Sir John’s birthday party.’

‘By Jove ! I wish you *would* forget that night !’ he exclaimed, with a vehemence that startled me.

‘I wish I could,’ I said, still laughing, however.

He started to his feet, and this time stood before me.

‘I conthider it very ungenerouth in you always to inthitth on remembering that evening, when you mutth have thecn, long ago, that my opinion of you hath changed thinthe then. It’th cruel—it’th very cruel ;’ and he stopped for a moment.

I looked up at him with a sudden apprehension—one glance showed me that he was in earnest this time. Poor Colonel Elphinstone ! who would have thought it ? But he gave me no time to think. He seized my hand, and then out came a rhapsody of something,—a declaration of love, mingled with lamentations as to his poverty, and doubts, and hopes, and perplexities, from which I could only gather that, if either he or I had had a fortune that would do for both, there was none in the world he would prefer to me.

I had been so taken by surprise by the whole affair that I had stupidly allowed him to retain my hand all this time ; but I rcovered myself now.

‘Colonel Elphinstone,’ I said, at the same time drawing away my hand, ‘I do not quite understand you ; but if your feelings for me have really changed so much as your words

imply, I ought to tell you that—that—my affections have long since been given to another.'

I brought out this with some effort, as I thought it the least offensive mode of reply ; and I had meant to add something still more conclusive, but I fell through it.

His face changed at the announcement (I wonder if he had expected me gratefully to respond to his sentiments, ambiguous as they were); but apparently he too 'thought better of it'—next moment he drew himself up haughtily, and was himself again.

'Aw——, the village doctor, I thuppothe,' he said, with a slight sneer. 'Excuthie me, but really I could not have thought Mith Fitth-Jameth would have thrown herthelf away in thith manner, ethpethially after the dethirable connection her thithter hath formed ; thitill leth, that Dr. Fitth-Jameth thould allow thuch a thacrifithe.'

This was more than I could pardon.

'That village doctor, Colonel Elphinstone,' I said, 'is all the world to me ;' and rising hastily, I walked away, and stopped not till I had gained my own room, where I had to calm down my indignation, and otherwise compose myself, before I could keep my appointment with Dr. Blackburn. I was so afraid of encountering Colonel Elphinstone anywhere about, that I went a long round by a back way, and kept Dr. Blackburn waiting for me several minutes, which I was very sorry for.

Fortunately he set down the visible signs of flurry that were still about me to my haste, and laughingly said that 'I must stand very much in awe of him, to hurry in that manner.'

Next morning, before I was out of bed, Nurse came to the door with a letter, which Marianne took from her.

'Surely Dr. Blackburn has changed his handwriting,' said she, turning it over, as she brought it to me. 'I declare,' as she caught sight of the seal, 'it is the Elphinstone crest, Ellie, and addressed to you !'

I sprang out of bed, my face on fire, and, seizing the letter, secured it in my dressing-case, without looking at it, and proceeded to dress, with a presentiment of something disagreeable impending. Marianne went on with her toilet, with an

injured air and in perfect silence ; I was sorry already for my hasty manner to her, but what could I do ?

‘ I don’t understand you, Ellie,’ she broke out at last, as she was leaving the room : ‘ you have just as many secrets as ever Harriet had, and I should not wonder, now, if you were to go and do the same thing ;’ and she shut the door.

Now was my only chance. I hurriedly took out the letter and opened it, and I am not sure that one or two tears did not fall on it before I closed it again.

It began with a manly and gentleman-like apology for the unwarrantable expressions he had used at parting the day before, which he said the feelings of the moment alone could excuse ; then went on, that I had seemed to think his words ambiguous, and that, therefore, in justice to himself, he must put his proposal in plain language—that if I would accept his hand and share his poverty, he would no longer think himself poor. He cared nothing, he said, for the opinion of friends, or other considerations—he was independent enough to consult his own wishes in that respect ; and if I would consent, he thought we might be very happy, although not rich. It ended with one or two warm expressions of attachment which I had not thought Colonel Elphinstone capable of uttering, and at which I fairly broke down and cried. It was most extraordinary ! ‘ His only love must, indeed, have arisen from his only hate.’ I was trying to restore my eyes to their wonted appearance when the breakfast-bell rang.

I could take no breakfast, which awakened mama’s anxious solicitude ; but Marianne preserved a dignified silence to me the whole time, and no wonder either.

I was glad to make the excuse of a headache, which I was now really beginning to feel, and escaped as soon as possible to my own room.

Of course, the first thing to be done was to answer the letter ; and with warm gratitude, and not a few tears, I thanked Colonel Elphinstone for his disinterested attachment, which I told him it was not in my power to return, as my heart and my hand were not now my own to give ; that, had



these been disengaged, his rank and fortune were far beyond my expectations ; and that his regard, also, was an honour that I had not looked for. I concluded by expressing my conviction that he would ere long meet with one in every way better fitted to be his companion in life than I, and that there was not one on earth for whose happiness I would more sincerely pray. I added, in a postscript, that, of course, I considered his confidence sacred from *every* one.

I sealed and addressed the letter, and put on my hat and jacket to post it myself. I would not trust it to any one.

I had got to the end of the bridge, and was hurrying up the little lane that led to the village, when, turning a corner, I came face to face with Dr. Blackburn. I have no doubt I looked caught, for he said, 'Ellie ! Ellie ! where are you running to ? Is this a letter to me ?' and he playfully took it out of my hand.

'Colonel Elphinstone !' he read in astonishment. 'What can you possibly have to say to him, Ellie ?'

'I will tell you if you wish it,' I said, very greatly perturbed, as I remembered my promise in the letter ; 'but I *think* I ought not.'

'Must I not ask, Ellie ?' he said, with a smile that redoubled my confusion. But I bethought myself in a moment—I owed *him* a duty which I owed to no one else, and, taking Colonel Elphinstone's letter from my pocket, I put it into his hands.

'He could not suppose I would not tell *you*,' I said.

'No, Ellie,' said he, giving it back to me, without even glancing at it. 'I don't want you to betray his confidence. I know Colonel Elphinstone, and I know you. But, Ellie,' he added gravely, turning with me, and still retaining my letter, 'you are very young ; are you quite sure you are not doing what in after years you will regret ?'

'Don't, don't !' I cried (it gave me pain even to hear him hint at such a thing). 'I wish the letter were sunk in the depths of the sea ;' and, as we were passing the post office at the moment, I took it out of his hand and threw it into the box.

'You are an independent young lady,' he said, again smiling. 'I shall have to look out for myself some of these days ! And oh, by the way, Ellie (that settled), I have another question

to ask you. When is Jenny to look for her mistress? She is always asking me that.'

Of course I was not going to answer that; but, as he said he was determined it should be before the end of next month at the latest, we agreed to leave the naming of the particular day to mama; and then we parted, he to go on his 'rounds,' and I home, where a small cloud awaited me in Marianne's continued pique. I had forgotten all about it; and, meeting her coming out of our room, I was going to kiss her, but she drew herself away.

'No, Ellie,' she said, and was about to pass me, when I caught her back again, and, throwing my arms round her,—

'Marianne darling,' I said, 'I would tell you what was in that letter, and show it you too, if it was anything that only belonged to me; but it is not. Dr. Blackburn did not ask me, though I met him just now, and he saw my letter. Don't be angry with me when I am just going away.'

And with a sister's kiss, and her own sweet smile again, the reconciliation was ratified and sealed.

Some days after this I heard through Harriet that Colonel Elphinstone had gone abroad, to rejoin his regiment, it was supposed. Also, that his engagement with Lady Charlotte had, with mutual consent, been finally broken off; though how long the one event had preceded the other, or whether they were at all connected, that deponent knew not.

'Reginald asserts that it is all *your* doing, Ellie, because he discovered that the Doctor had secured you,' she said suddenly, looking rather inquiringly at me, which was not a little trying at the time, as Marianne was also present. However, I managed to evade the subject; and, whatever they might either of them have surmised from my face, they never afterwards alluded to it by word or look.

I was sorry that I should have been the cause in any way of pain to Colonel Elphinstone. It was a cloud on the brightness of my own horizon; but I did not think the wound would be very deep. I wished him all happiness; and, in giving myself up to dearer thoughts, earnestly hoped that happier and brighter days might soon again be his.



## CHAPTER XXI.

### NUPTIALS AGAIN.

‘For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness, or health, till death us do part.’



OF the pleasant bustle and preparation of the next few weeks I can give no detailed account, and I need not. A wedding is a common enough occurrence, though it is generally the one great event to individuals.

The day before the wedding (the third of April) arrived, and brought with it the usual last day's bustle. Dresses, favours, gloves, and cake were all in readiness. Relays of cousins and friends, from Glasgow and elsewhere, kept pouring in ; and, what with entertaining them, exhibiting presents, and trying on dresses, the time seemed positively to fly. Harriet had insisted on presenting my *trousseau*, and a magnificent one it was ; and various splendid additions in the shape of jewels, etc., were made by Mr. Scott, Sir John Maitland, and other friends.

In the very midst of all the bustle came Dr. Blackburn, who would not understand our repeated hints that he was very much in the way, and insisted that he had come expressly to see how I looked in the wedding-dress ; but Nurse would not hear of such a thing. She said ‘it wadna be lucky,’ and he had to be satisfied without.

‘This is the last time I shall have to come and see you, Ellie,’ he said, as he took leave at the front door. ‘To-morrow I will have you all to myself.’

‘Ah, perhaps you will tire of that,’ I said, trying a little laugh; ‘and oh, what if you do?’

He answered only by a closer caress, and whispering, ‘Nothing but death can part *us*, my Ellie,’ he went away.

Ah, could there not?

‘I’ll be an old maid, at all events,’ said Lizzie, when I went back to the parlour. ‘I never could bind myself like that to any man. Only to think, Ellie, that after to-night you can never go anywhere, or do anything, of your own accord!—just a slave, poor thing!’ and she shook her head, with mock compassion.

Well, if I were a slave, I hugged my chain. Yes,—I gloried in it!

The morning came, a sweet April morning, and I woke a bride,—with the sun streaming in upon me through the open window, and the birds singing a joyous ode to the day, as Harriet had done seven months before, but in circumstances so different! The accompaniments, certainly, were less splendid in my case, but what cared I for these? A gown of serge and a chaplet of ashes, with the prospect of a hut in the wilderness, would have been the same to me,—*he* was mine, and I had all. The Scripture injunction, to ‘leave father and mother,’ etc., was easy in one sense for me. They were very dear to me,—dearer than words can tell—never so dear as at that moment,—but *he* was more!

‘Happy is the bride that the sun shines on,’ I thought to myself, as, getting out of bed as noiselessly as I could, not to wake Marianne, I knelt down by the window, and there supplicated the blessing of the Father of all upon the new life which that day would begin. I remember shedding a good many tears during our dressing, at the thought that this was our last morning together, and of having to check them back on Marianne’s account, as she was crying all the time.

Then I put on my hat, and crossed the gravel walk into the churchyard, to take leave of the beloved sleepers there for a time,—and, kneeling under the willow-tree, I again committed my new life, and all who were dear to me, wholly into the care

and keeping of the loving Father, knowing that only *thus* could we be safe ; and then I came back, hushed and tranquillized in the ineffable peace which ten minutes *there* always brought me.

How I wondered that morning how any girl could take such a step, with any other feelings than of that perfect love which 'casteth out fear' ! I remember all the circumstances of that day so well,—family prayers, which calmed and strengthened us all ; breakfast, which all Uncle Maitland's and Mr. Lambert's kind efforts could not make a very lively one (papa, who at any other time would have seconded them so well, now showing unmistakable symptoms of breaking down) ; mama's efforts to keep up, and Marianne's determination not to give way ; Nurse's importance over the luncheon preparations, and her lamentations over one of the confectioner's men who had got a little tipsy ! and even the arrival at the last moment of my travelling hat, the non-appearance of which, the night before, had struck all the bride's maids with consternation. I was not in the least nervous till they began to dress me ; and then I began to realize, for the first time, that I was indeed leaving my home.

Afterwards, I remember very little of what passed, except that, when I was arrayed in my white silk, wreath, and veil, Nurse pronounced me 'just like an angel,' though where she had caught sight of such a beatific vision was best known to herself. I remember sitting down on the sofa by Marianne to *wait*, my hand clasped in hers, and of hearing, as in a dream, the girls' and Nurse's comments on the company now constantly streaming in : 'How beautiful Mrs. Scott looked !—like a bride herself,' and 'Lady Maitland, almost as lovely, and beautifully dressed ;' then, with a portentous sinking of the voice (enough to alarm any nerves of only average firmness), came 'The bridegroom !' and I heard no more.

My wits seemed scattered from that moment. I have a dim recollection of Harriet coming into the room, kissing me, and going away again ; then of walking somewhere on papa's arm, and letting fall my bouquet by the way ; of hearing the Second Para-

phrase sung as I entered the room, and being placed beside Dr. Blackburn, my bride's maids following. I have also visions of Jenny, arrayed in a magnificent cap, with white satin ribbons, as if she had been a bride's maid, standing not far from me, beside Nurse and Betsy, who were similarly attired—and my old friend Robbie, dressed in his best black suit (it had been an agreement between Robbie and me since I was seven years old, that he should be at my marriage); but all the rest is indistinct.

Papa began to speak, but I did not hear one word, though I managed to bow at the proper time; and I did not hear Uncle Maitland's address at all. Marianne had to take my hand to draw off the glove; and I knew nothing more till it was all over, and I found myself being kissed and congratulated by every one as 'Mrs. Blackburn.' Then came cake and wine, and pinning on of favours; and then I was carried off to my own room again, still in a maze, and my bridal robes exchanged for travelling costume. Nurse's laborious efforts to give me my new name were rather amusing, especially as Harriet was also in the room; and between 'Mrs. Scott' and 'Mrs. Blackburn,' the dear old body's brain was quite bewildered,—the best of it all being that she was sure to forget both our titles for ever afterwards.

Then came the good-byes and kisses, and 'a fareweel' from Robbie, as if I had been to sail for Australia. Then Mr. Scott's eyes were regaled with a display of old shoes (which Nurse had been hoarding ever since she heard of the engagement), such as, I am sure, all his philosophy never dreamt of before; and then we were driving away, as fast as the Dalmany horses could take us, to the railway station. When we rolled across the bridge, and the Manse had disappeared from sight, I remember I cried, and then my husband spoke to me,—almost his first words,—and I was comforted.

Our tour only lasted a week. It was as much as my husband could spare from his profession; and April was yet in her first smiles when we came home. We had a happy

home-coming! The 'haill parish, I am sure, were at their doors to see us drive past; and we had as much bowing, right and left, as if we had been making a progress to show ourselves. 'The Manse' *in toto* was over to receive us; and Jenny broke a whole cake of shortbread over my head.

It was such a strange, happy evening! Marianne and Jenny pioneering me in triumph through 'my house;' and then Marianne, and Louisa, and Lizzie, among them, arrayed me, per force, in one of my finest silk dresses, to do honour to my company; which I thought quite unnecessary trouble, when they were all the 'company;' but they *would* do it.

Mama did the honours for me that night, so that I had nothing to do but enjoy myself; while papa and Dr. Blackburn vied with each other in making the evening pass happily. Then my new piano had to be tried, and various other experiments made under guidance; and I won't say that it was strictly 'regulation hour' when we at last broke up. It was a happy little party that!

A bachelor's establishment, however well ordered, requires always a measure of reform under a new administration; and Dr. Blackburn's was no exception. Although Jenny and her subordinate were above the average in that respect, still I had a good deal to do, in arranging things as I liked them. Marianne laughingly asserted that Jenny had cause to rue the day when her mistress had come home; but Jenny did not think so: although I say it that should not say it, Jenny loved her mistress, and said, 'It was a blithe day for the hoose whan Miss Heelen cam' till't.'

I had plenty of visitors the first few weeks; and, although newly out of a large family, I did not weary in the least. I was, of course, very differently situated from Harriet, who had merely to glance every morning over the dinner-programme which the housekeeper had drawn up, and her day's work in that way was over. My housekeeping was a different affair, as Jenny was by no means an unexceptionable cook, and I really sometimes thought she would be offended at the hints

I gave her ; but she never was. She was a worthy person, Jenny, in every way.

I had also my parish work, district visiting, etc., in addition to these. Dr. Blackburn had not given up any of the public duties he had taken upon himself, either in the Sabbath school or elsewhere, and I still accompanied him. Indeed there was more need than ever for our taking hold now. As for my literary avocations,—ahem !—I had quite discontinued *these*, notwithstanding my husband's protest. I considered that I had more important duties to occupy me now ; and I told him I would leave the pen, and the plume too, to him !

Of course we had the gauntlet to run in the way of entertainments (though most of the county families, including the Scotts, were now in London for the season), the only drawback being, that once or twice I had to go without my husband, and very often to return without him, which was not pleasant ; and once, when we had a party of gentlemen ourselves, he was called away just when he was dressing for dinner ; and I would have been left alone to entertain them as I best could, had not papa most fortunately been there to preside. Such is the penalty of 'belonging to the public' !

The outside world went on as usual. We heard frequently from Harriet, who, it seemed, was very gay in London. She had been presented at Court, and, as we heard from various quarters, had fulfilled Lady Penrith's prediction, as she had certainly made a sensation ; and Sir John, who came down for a day or two on business, told us that Mr. Scott was evidently very proud of the admiration she excited. Mama, I could see, was a little afraid that Harriet's head would be turned with all this ; but papa always comforted her by saying, 'It was her first season, and she would settle down by and by.'

But it was not so easy to console the tenantry and other subjects of the Dalmany estate, as the dissatisfaction among them had risen to a height which threatened to result in serious consequences, and which would not be quelled by any measures short of the ejectment of Mr. Morton from the place.



And that seemed a blessing too great to be hoped for, as Mr. Scott's ears remained hermetically sealed against all complaints touching his factor.

It began to be whispered in many quarters that Mr. Morton had secrets of the late Mr. Scott in his possession which would seriously reflect on his memory; and that his son was unwilling to discharge him on that account. But the more general impression was that Mr. Scott himself was a Papist at heart, and was in this manner, covertly but surely, paving the way for the re-establishment of Popery, on his own domain at least. And it became more and more difficult for us to exhort the people to remain steadfast to their own faith, when poverty and loss seemed to be the inevitable result.

'It is inconceivable how Scott persists in retaining such a man,' I heard papa say one day, when some new grievance had come to his ear. 'He must have a motive for acting as he does, and a powerful one, too, though what it can be I cannot even imagine.'

It became quite painful for us to hear the complaints that were everywhere uttered against Mr. Morton, and, by inference, of course, Mr. Scott. At first the people were chary of speaking of the latter before any of us. But they soon dropped this reserve; and one poor woman, whose husband had been thrown out of employment from some caprice of Mr. Morton's, openly broke out, in my presence, against Mr. Scott for tolerating such injustice.

'He's ne'er been a blessin' to the country-side—cravin' your pardon, mem.' She wound up with: 'I wonder he's no' feared for a judgment fa'in' on his heid, for lettin' the puir folk be trampit on as he's doin'; but it'll come doon on him some day—'deed an' it wull!'

'Surely this cannot go on long?' I said to my husband one day, when he had been telling me that old Andrew Gray, the lodge-keeper at Dalnany, had been dismissed from the post he had occupied for thirty years, for no reason at all but to make way for a *protégé* of Mr. Morton's. 'Really a judgment will fall on Mr. Scott, as the people say, if he does not inter-

fere to prevent this state of things. What can be his reason for allowing it to go on?’

He shook his head. ‘That rests with his own conscience, my Ellie. We have only to do what we can to smooth matters as far as possible for the injured. Andrew is provided for, at all events; I spoke to Colonel Craufurd about him to-day, and he will give him employment, perhaps not quite so easy as he has had, but better, certainly, than nothing.’

‘It is very mortifying to have had to ask Colonel Craufurd for such a favour,’ I said indignantly. ‘You will have enough to do if you try to smooth matters for Mr. Scott. He really does not deserve it. And do you know that Mr. Morton is in a towering passion already at you for “interfering,” as he calls it, with his people? He says you are at the bottom of all their discontent.’

Dr. Blackburn laughed.

‘That is an old story, Ellie—his anger at me,’ he said. ‘It began the day I set foot in the parish—long before I knew you. But I don’t at all regard Mr. Morton’s anger, so long as I am doing what I think right.’

Of course not; but for all that it was not pleasant.

The very next day I had further proof of Mr. Morton’s enmity towards my husband. I had been to see poor Mrs. Gray, who was lamenting bitterly having been ‘putten awa’ frae the hoose where a’ the bairns had been born an’ brocht up;’ and I was just coming out of the cottage when Mr. Morton passed. It was the first time I had met him since my marriage. He slightly raised his hat and bowed.

‘How do you do, Mrs. Blackburn?’ he said. His words were smoother than butter, but I could see that war was in his heart; and again, as once before, he walked along with me unbidden, and in silence also; for I was resolved to say nothing to him I could avoid.

‘So,’ said he at last, with a suppressed sneer, ‘you have been condoling with Gray’s people on their change of residence, I suppose?’

I *had* been condoling with the poor old man on the loss it

was to him in every respect ; but I would not let Mr. Morton see how much I felt.

‘I have been seeing Andrew, certainly,’ I said ; and that was all.

‘Well,’ said he, evidently in rising wrath, ‘not a word more? not a single remonstrance? Your husband is not so sparing of my feelings. He treated me to a piece of his mind no longer ago than yesterday. But, fortunately, I am not accountable to Dr. Blackburn for my actions,—nor to any man,’ he added loftily.

This was high language, certainly, for a factor to use.

‘Mr. Morton,’ I said quietly (for it was no use disturbing myself on account of any words of his), ‘there is a Higher Tribunal, where you will have one day to give an account of your actions. It will be well for you if you can answer for them there.’

‘Oh, I will answer for myself there—no need to trouble yourself on that score,’ was the angry retort. ‘It will be well for your precious husband if he can answer as well.’

This roused me effectually.

‘Mr. Morton,’ I said, with all a wife’s indignant pride, ‘it is well that none of us are required to trust to our own actions on that day ; but it will indeed be well if all can bring as clear an account as my husband.’

‘Indeed!’ said Mr. Morton, with ironical emphasis. ‘Well, I acquit him as to any breach of the first commandment, perhaps, and the second ; but are you very sure you can answer for him as to the seventh, and the sixth (that is not quite in the established order, perhaps, but you’ll excuse it)? and murder of the soul is more a mortal sin than the other.’

At this most atrocious insinuation I stood still for a moment speechless, both with surprise and indignation ; then I said calmly, ‘That, Mr. Morton, is at all events one lie that must go to your account, but I scorn to refute it ;’ and I turned and left him, though not before he had called after me,—

‘Tell me that a month hence, young lady, and I’ll believe you.’

But I paid no heed, and walked on at a pace that soon took me out of hearing. Of course his insinuations fell upon me as harmlessly as his prediction did. Nothing that he or any other man could say would in the smallest degree lessen my unbounded trust and pride in my husband ; and when Dr. Blackburn came in, some hours afterwards, I did not even mention to him that I had seen Mr. Morton. But, as I said before, these things were not pleasant.





## CHAPTER XXII.

### A THUNDERBOLT.

'I gang like a ghaist, an' I carena to spin,  
I daurna think on Jamie, for that wad be a sin.  
My eyes are dull and weary, an' my heart is full of care,  
And the burden that I carry is heavier than I can bear.'



LIKE her predecessors, June came and passed, giving way to her still fairer sister. I was no longer a bride—I had been married three months now. Harriet and her husband were still in London, in the midst of gaiety, and they were on the eve of starting again for the Continent. I did not envy her: her life would not have suited me in any way; my happiness needed no augmentation. But these halcyon days were on the wing. A crisis was approaching—a shadow was hovering over us even now, and we knew it not.

It was the third of July—shall I ever forget it, marked as it is in memory's eye with a cross of fiery red? We had been dining in Edinburgh with an old friend of Dr. Blackburn's, and, after a pleasant party, had driven home in the evening in a little pony-carriage which my husband had bought at the time of our marriage; and certainly no presentiment of coming sorrow troubled either of us during that happy drive. Ah me! we are short-sighted mortals.

As we alighted at the door, Jenny met us with a message that the Doctor was wanted immediately, 'owerbye' at a cottage she named; and, only waiting to change his coat, he went off.

He was long in returning; and when he did come in he

went straight to his consulting-room, and I heard the door closed. An hour passed, and, as he did not come, I went to seek him ; even with my hand on the handle of the door, I was thinking of the party we had just left. He was standing by the mantelpiece, leaning against it, as if in deep thought. He turned round when I entered, and the face that met mine I never shall forget while memory lasts ! The night at Woodlands—the day I met him on the road—were nothing, nothing to the death-like pallor, the mute despair, now depicted there. The room swam before my eyes for a moment, then I went forward and took hold of him ; his hand was as cold as ice.

‘William, what is it?’ I gasped. He did not seem to hear me, till I almost screamed, ‘William ! William ! speak to me !’

My voice seemed to recall him to himself, for he looked up, then suddenly caught me in his arms, almost with a sob. ‘My poor, poor Ellie !’ was all he said.

I was unspeakably terrified ; some great misery, I was sure, had come upon us.

‘What is it?’ I cried again ; ‘tell me, oh, tell me !’ and I clasped his hand convulsively.

‘You will know soon enough,’ he moaned.

‘Say it right out,’ I implored ; ‘whatever it is, it cannot be worse than this.’

He tried to speak once or twice, but could not ; at last, with a sort of gasping effort, he said,—

‘And if it should kill you ?—if it should break your heart ?’

‘Nothing will do that, so long as I have you.’

‘Ellie ! Ellie !’ and again he strained me in his arms, as if I were about to be torn from him ; but still he did not speak.

At this moment Jenny, seeing the door ajar, put in her head, exclaiming in excitement,—

‘Do ye ken what they’re sayin’ in the toon, sir ?—that Katie Gourlay—Robbie’s dochter that was deid—she’s no’ deid ava ; she’s livin’, an’ comin’ back hame.’

Kitty Gourlay living ! The words darted like arrows to my brain ! For one terrible moment I saw Jenny gazing at me

appalled ; the next, Jenny and the room receded from my sight, and I fell.

I awoke to find myself on the floor, my husband bending over me, and the room empty. At first I could not remember where I was, but recollection returned all too soon. 'It's not true—it's not true!' were the first words I uttered. 'Say it is not;' and again I grasped him convulsively.

'Are you better, darling?' was all he answered, as he lifted me to the sofa.

'It can't be true!' I cried, raising myself in an agony. 'The letter said she was dead.'

But his rigid, death-like face was my only answer, and again there was a blank.

The whole history of that dreadful night I could not tell to mortal ear. I wonder now that life and reason stayed with me through all. The first thing that roused me from the kind of stupor into which I had fallen was a noise at the front door—some one entering. I remember glancing at the timepiece, and observing that the hands pointed to eight o'clock. Oh, how the bright morning sunshine seemed to mock our misery! But just then a knock came to the door, and Jenny's awe-struck face looked in to say, 'Robbie Gourlay was waitin' to see the Doctor.'

He shuddered. He had never quitted his place by the sofa, or his hold of me, all through that dreadful night; and I am sure he looked worse than I. I raised myself with a shiver. 'Let him come in,' I said, 'here.'

'No, no,' he said hastily, replacing me on the sofa, and drawing the shawls he had wrapped me in closer about me; 'I will see him alone; you are not fit.'

'Let him come,' I gasped again; 'he can tell nothing I do not know already, and it may be better for you.'

Jenny withdrew, and presently Robbie entered. He drew back when he saw me, and seemed to hesitate about entering; but a second glance must have shown him that we both knew all; and, sitting down on a chair at the door, he fairly broke

down. 'Oh, Doctor! Doctor!' he cried; 'wha wad hae thoct this o' you?'

Poor old man! he was terribly changed as well as we! His words roused me effectually. I could not hear *him* blamed. I got up with an effort, and went to the chair where the old man sat, and took his hand.

'Robbie,' I said,—though the words would scarcely come from my parched and trembling lips,—'Dr. Blackburn has never been to blame in this. Don't think so.'

He grasped my hand convulsively. 'I'm jist kind o' dazed wi't a', Miss Heelen,' said he. 'I'm wae for ye; but, ye see, she's ma ain flesh an' bluid, and I maun see her richted.'

'Certainly,' I said, trembling so that I could scarcely stand; but at this moment Dr. Blackburn came forward.

'Ellie, my darling, leave us for a little,' was his whispered request; and, opening the door, he led me into the dining-room, and, putting me on the sofa, left me alone.

I clasped my hands on my burning forehead, to still its throbs, but in vain—the thought that had been with me all through the livelong night rendered my efforts useless. If Kitty Gourlay was his wife, what was I? what was I? My brain reeled, and for a moment I almost felt as if my senses were leaving me. 'Was ever grief like unto my grief?' surely no. Then out of the depths I cried to Him who, if He smites, can also heal, and He heard me.

I must have sat there a long, long time, but no one came near me. I heard the voices in the next room talking in low and earnest tones, and I thought the interview would never end. Suddenly I bethought me of the letter *he* had written to me before our marriage, with the one it enclosed; it might be well *her* father should see that. I rose, and went to my desk, took out the letters, and, with them in my hand, I went back to the room. They were standing when I entered, and Robbie seemed in the act of departing. Deep agitation was visible in the countenances of both.

'Here is a letter I wish you to read, Robbie,' I said, putting both in his hand.



Dr. Blackburn looked surprised, but said nothing; and I sat down, while the old man, fumbling out his spectacles, stumbled forward to the window, and began to read. I felt strangely calm, and nerved—at least in some degree—for all I knew was coming. Not a word was spoken. Dr. Blackburn paced hurriedly up and down the room, his lips compressed, his hands clenched, his whole man betraying the tempest within; while the old man read, with fascinated eyes, the characters that seemed to burn into his inmost soul.

At last he folded them up. 'Wae's me! wae's me!' was all he said, and no wonder. What a revelation it was to a parent's heart! Slowly he took off his spectacles, drew the back of his hand across his dim eyes, walked across the room, and laid the letters on my lap.

'I am sorry for you, Robbie,' I murmured brokenly.

He looked at me compassionately.

'Eh, puir thing!—but ye suld be far vexter for yersel,' he said, and vanished out of the room.

I seemed to be the stronger of the two now; for, utterly worn out, as it seemed, with the night and the recent interview, Dr. Blackburn had thrown himself on the sofa, looking more dead than alive. I went forward and took his cold hand in both of mine, and kissed it repeatedly. He drew me to him and kissed me passionately again and again, but he never spoke. What could he say?

'You are faint, love,' I said. 'I must get you something;' and, hurrying to the dining-room, I poured out some wine, and hastened back with it. But he put it away from him with a shudder, and a faint 'thank you,' and closed his eyes, as if he never cared to open them again.

This must not be; and I went back again to the table where breakfast stood untasted, and returned with a cup of hot tea, and a piece of toast.

'Drink this, love,' I said; and I made him drink it, and eat a small bit of toast, which seemed to revive him a little.

'Oh, Ellie!' he cried at last; 'what a blow is this that has come upon us!'

My heart echoed his words, but I could not answer ; I only sat—his hand clasped in mine—feeling that the hours of our union were numbered, and even this could not last. Ah ! this was indeed a parting worse than death ; and who could have foreseen it ?

Once I spoke, and only once.

‘It is the Lord ; let Him do what seemeth to Him good,’ broke from my trembling lips.

‘Ah, my Ellie !’ he said brokenly ; ‘but the flesh is weak—the flesh is weak.’

I knew, and he knew also, that there was a wise, a good purpose, even in this ; but faith was faint just now, and, ah me ! sense was sorely tried.

I wondered that we were so long uninterrupted, for it must have been pretty late in the forenoon before any one came. But ill news travels fast ; and I suppose the whole village had heard it ere this.

It was long past noon when I heard papa’s voice in the lobby. I shivered when I heard it, for I knew what must come ! Dr. Blackburn rose from the sofa, and went to the door.

‘You have heard ?’ he said, as papa entered.

‘I have,’ was all the answer.

That he also had got a shock, I saw by his face. Oh, what had not *her* wrong-doing entailed !

After a pause Dr. Blackburn again spoke.

‘Did you see’— he stopped.

‘I saw Gourlay,’ was the reply. ‘It is a dreadful affair this !’ and he wearily seated himself on a chair.

A letter was lying on the table. I had not observed it before. Papa stretched out his hand.

‘Is this *her* letter ?’ he asked, and took it up.

During the confused conversation that followed, I gathered that a man belonging to the village (an Irish labourer, and zealous partisan of Mr. Charteris), who had returned from America about a month previously, had seen the girl Gourlay alive and well in a town there, and had lost no time in acquainting her father with the fact. And Robbie, it appeared,

though aghast at the tidings, had managed to keep the matter to himself till he had written to the address given, and ascertained it for certain. The result had been a letter from herself the day before, which had, it seemed, so upset Mrs. Gourlay and her daughters, that they had spread it through the whole village immediately. No wonder!—the events that had occurred first and last in connection with Kitty had been enough to astonish weaker minds.

When papa laid down the letter I took it up; *her* letter! I must see it. It was to her father, and contained *her* account of the circumstances of her leaving Lady Jane's, as well as her subsequent marriage to Dr. Blackburn, which was the first intimation of the event they had received. The marriage, she said, had not been a happy one, from faults probably on both sides, which had been her reason for quitting London, and afterwards causing an intimation of her death to be sent home, to cause her husband remorse for his treatment of her. She added that, as she had some little time since been converted to the true (the Roman Catholic) faith, she had now come to see how wrong her conduct had been, and intended to come home immediately, and offer to return to her husband, if he would receive her. If he refused to receive her, she said, she could easily maintain herself, somewhere near her family, by her old business of dressmaking. The letter was signed 'Catherine Blackburn.'

A postscript was added, to the effect that she and her aunt had taken out their passage in the *Arcturus*, which would sail on the 1st of August, and that they might be expected to arrive on the 14th or 16th of the month.

The letter fell from my hands. Well, well!—one going through the bitterness of death for him—the other slighting him like this! There was nothing doubtful now—no room even for questioning; Robbie's daughter was his wife, and I—was nothing to him.

I heard Dr. Blackburn and papa talking about 'investigating, of course,' and 'possibility of legal steps,' etc.; but I heard as though I heard them not. A sort of stupefaction

seemed to have come over me again. I sat without speaking—almost without moving—till papa came forward to me.

‘Ellie, my child,’ he said, ‘you must come home;’ and for the first time since Willie’s death his firm lip quivered.

I knew I must. I had no longer any right in that house. Mechanically I rose to obey him. Dr. Blackburn stood at the door; but he made no movement to prevent me; he knew as well as I that it must be so. Our union had ended.

I went to my room,—*our* room,—and, without giving myself time to think, took my hat and jacket from the wardrobe, and was about to put them on, when the sight of my own face in the glass startled me. Still in my dinner silk (which I had not taken off), now crushed and soiled,—my face haggard and ghastly, my eyes wild and bloodshot,—I scarcely knew myself to be the same being who had stood there the day before, a happy wife! Alas, alas!

I would not stay to change my dress. ‘Better get it over at once,’ I murmured, ‘and then let me go—I care not whither—to die;’ for surely I could not live with this weight of grief!

When I came out of my room, papa was at the front door, with his hat in his hand. He turned away abruptly when he saw me; and I went into the room to bid *him* farewell.

He was standing at the window when I entered. He turned round, but stood still, and did not speak. I went up to him and took his hand; but he drew it passionately away, and threw his arms round me, as if he would keep me still, in spite of all.

‘Ellie, Ellie!’ he cried, in a suffocated tone; ‘will you leave me after all?’

I could not trust myself to speak—only kissed him many times, disengaged myself from his arms, and rushed away.

Papa came forward and took me on his arm. The village gig was at the door—he put me in. I could see poor old Jenny and the other servant looking after us with scared faces, but they did not venture to come forward; and, with one look at the home where I had been so happy, I was driven away from it, leaving *him* alone.

I must have been very calm ; for I remember seeing papa look at me wonderingly once or twice during our short drive ; but he never spoke. What, indeed, could he have said ? And when we came to the door, and mama and Marianne met me, a whole world of silent loving sympathy in their faces, I spoke to them quietly, as if I had only come to make a visit, and passed into the parlour.

How well I remember every little trifling circumstance of that day, which seem stamped on my brain with a vividness never to be effaced !—the parlour in its usual mid-day disarrangement,—the piano, which had been always wont to stand open at that hour, and which I thought looked so dismal closed,—Harry standing at the window, slitting a piece of wood for a ship, and his precipitating himself upon me, asking ‘if I had come home to stay ?’ How changed it all was to me !

My calmness seemed to appal them all, as they did not attempt to speak—only looked at me with frightened faces. But, indeed, I was so exhausted with previous emotion, that I was not able to be anything else, and the time for realizing my position fully had not yet come.

By and by I went up to my room—my old room, which I had left as a bride three months before, as I thought for ever. Mama and Marianne had prepared another room for me, thinking that the associations of this would be too painful ; but I would have no other. I stood a long time gazing out at the window on the familiar scene ; but I neither thought nor saw. When the gong sounded for dinner, I went down and took my place as usual, as if I had never been away. I felt I could get on so long as no one took any notice of me ; and I think they understood the feeling, as no one attempted to speak. Even Nurse, whom I had met on the stairs, had been awed into silence by the greatness of my calamity, and had attempted nothing but a woful look.

They tried to talk of other things, and I could sit on ; but when mama addressed some special term of endearment to

me, I could not bear it, and raised my hand imploringly for her to stop.

Dinner and tea passed well enough, but the reaction came. Tom, who (as I afterwards learned), a very coward at the sight of grief, had actually been afraid to meet me, had gone out to take a long walk, and only came in when we had finished tea. He came to the window where I was standing, to speak to me; and something in my face, perhaps, had touched the depths of his boyish nature, for he suddenly bent forward and kissed me—the first time in his life, I suppose, Tom had ever done such a thing. But it was more than I could bear just then,—my pent-up feelings seemed all at once to give way,—and the result was a frightful fit of hysterical weeping, which terrified them all so much that mama could not be satisfied till Tom had gone to Strathie, and brought back Dr. Bell to see me.

I suppose the old doctor knew just as well as I did that he could do nothing for ‘the mind diseased;’ but he gave me something, as he said, ‘to make me sleep,’ and came duteously every day, till he had at least got me out of bed.

Those first few days are a blank in my remembrance; for, though I was not unconscious (my fever being more of the mind than the body—if, indeed, the latter was affected at all), still, to all that belonged to the outer world I might as well have been so. I had no wish ever again to rise from the bed on which they had laid me *that night*; for what was life now to me? I used to lie awake all the night thinking, and if I dropped to sleep, it was only to awake to worse anguish, after dreaming of *him*. How the bright morning light used to sicken me, as it streamed in through the closed shutters, and I would turn shiveringly from it, and close my aching eyes, and wish I could shut them for ever on this weary, weary world! Ah, well! the good Lord had patience with me, and so had they all.

The first thing that really roused me was, one day—a week after my return—awaking with a sort of scream from a troubled sleep, to find my poor old Jenny bending over me

with a woe-begone face. She had come up-stairs in defiance of Nurse's prohibition, and, finding no one to impede her progress, had walked in. The sight of her was almost too much for me at first, with all the associations she brought along with her; but the next moment (forgetting all considerations in the one thing I was pining to hear) I grasped her hard hand, and gasped out, almost inarticulately, in my eagerness, 'Jenny—tell me—how is *he*?'

Poor Jenny's eyes were overflowing in a moment; she did not scruple, as a more 'discreet' person might, about answering my question; she only hesitated how to address me,—the old name she *would* not go back to—the more recent one she feared to give me,—ending the doubt with 'Ma bairn! hoo can he be weel? He gangs like a ghaist—'deed does he; but it'll aye be a comfort till him to ken about ye; for I aye gang in, an' tell him whan I've been ower; an' he thanks me kindly, though he ne'er sen's me.'

I recollected myself now, and questioned no further, though I saw Jenny was quite ready to answer all I might ask. But the visit altogether did me good; and poor Jenny (who never once omitted her daily visit, to look at me at least) was no longer prevented from coming and going to my room at discretion. She had at once, and utterly, refused to let my boxes and effects be removed from Colston Lodge, 'till we sec,' she maintained, with a mysterious nod; and Nurse, who had been sent over for them in the gig (and whose notions of what was 'proper' were altogether opposed to Jenny's), found herself fairly vanquished by the resolution of her opponent, and obliged to content herself with selecting the things I had immediate use for. And so it happened that—that they were never removed.

No words can describe how kind my dear ones were to me through all that dreadful time! Marianne would sit hours on the bed beside me, even during the day—not trying to reason, only soothing and loving me, and gave up all her own occupations and amusements to this one kind task. It would have been a different thing for me had she not been at home.

Tom, too, poor fellow, would come and look at me with *such* looks as we never knew before that Tom had to give; and they all, even Harry, did their very utmost to restore and keep alive my sinking heart.

Mama, too, by her kind and loving counsel, ever pointing me upward, at last succeeded in bringing my weary spirit back in some degree to its true rest—acquiescence in the Divine Father's will, whatever that might involve, knowing that 'all my life was portioned out' by Him, and that even this heavy trial which He had suffered to befall me, would be overruled for good; and impressing upon me how unhappy it made papa and all of them to see me like this, they at last persuaded me, for their sakes, to rouse myself a little out of my black despair. I must have been a great trial to them all in those terrible days (though, as I said before, they never showed it in the least degree), for I was sadly ungrateful in my great grief; and instead of thankfully acknowledging how many, many blessings and alleviations I had still left to me, I too often felt—and showed that I did—that in losing one, I had lost all.

I remember once astonishing poor Nurse by my irritability one day when I was still in bed, and she was bending over and petting me, poor body, in her warm sympathy, calling me, as usual, 'Miss Heelen.' But somehow the name jarred on me that day, and I turned crossly away from her.

'Oh, call me nothing, Nurse,' I said impatiently. 'Why do you insist on naming me? I have no name.'

'Ma bairn!' said poor Nurse, aghast at the outbreak, 'your faither's name's as guid as ever—an' it's aye to the fore yet.' However, like Jenny, she cautiously abstained from giving me any name for a time.

Of course all topics that could agitate me were also carefully kept from me; but, on inquiring, I learned that Kitty Gourlay and her aunt had adhered to their intention of sailing in the *Arcturus*, and would, if all went well, reach home in about three weeks. Also that the Gourlays (albeit, it was suspected, with no great alacrity on Mrs. Gourlay's part) were making great preparations to receive them. Robbie and his family



had been assiduous in their inquiries for me during my illness—their simple hearts had recognised no difference towards us, in consequence of the discovery that had been made; and they never dreamed that we could have any feeling towards them. And we had not; they were in no respect to blame for anything that had come upon me; and even in *her* I could not but feel a heavy interest, though I cherished no such expectations from her coming as Jenny and some others did. The hope of my return *home* was one I never fastened on. It was not probable.

The day after I had heard the above news (the 29th July, exactly a year since the day of our happy picnic in the Dalmany grounds), I was making a weary effort to practise mama's counsels, and had gone into the garden for the first time, trying to take some little interest in the flowers. Marianne had been out with me, but had been called in to receive some visitors; and I was just thinking of going in also, when a gentleman suddenly came up the approach, and, seeing me in the garden, he came towards me. I saw to my extreme surprise that it was Mr. Scott, whom I had believed at that moment to be in Switzerland. His face was haggard, his eyes looked almost wild, and there was an excitement in his whole manner very unusual in *him*.

Entirely roused for the moment from my own personal grief, I hastened to meet him, alarmed that something had befallen Harriet.

'What is the matter?' I cried, without even greeting him. 'Is Harriet ill?'

'No, no,' he answered hurriedly, and holding out his hand.

'Is she with you?' I asked, a little reassured.

'No, I left her in London.'

'But why—why?'—why had he come down? I was about to ask, when I stopped in time. Mr. Scott's business was certainly no affair of mine. But it seemed it was.

'I wished to see how you had borne it,—that it had not killed you,' he murmured, while his eyes seemed to read my face earnestly.

I thought this was very kind—very, very kind—and said so. I certainly never expected that of Mr. Scott.

He did not heed my words—scarcely seemed to hear.

‘And your husband—Dr. Blackburn,’ he added, correcting himself, ‘how does he take it?’

I shook my head.

‘You cannot think he would take it well. It has been a dreadful blow to both of us.’

‘No doubt, no doubt!’ he cried; but, I am sure, with no knowledge of what he did say. He stood for a little silent, and I was just about to propose he should come into the house, when he spoke.

‘When is *she* to be home?’ he asked, with a gasp, as it seemed to me.

‘*His* wife?’ I asked, with an effort. ‘She was to sail on the 1st.’

‘Then she will be here in about a fortnight, or three weeks at the furthest?’

‘Yes, I suppose so,’ and my voice shook a little.

He struck his forehead with his clenched hand.

‘That wretch Morton!’ broke from him impetuously.

‘Oh, Mr. Scott,’ I involuntarily exclaimed, ‘Mr. Morton could have had nothing to do with this! No need to charge him with more than he has already to answer for’—

‘He has! he has!’ he cried, in excitement,—‘he is a fiend in the likeness of man; and I—bound hand and foot as I am—how can I call him to account?’

His whole manner was so extraordinary, that, used as I had been of late to startling events, I confess it alarmed me—I really thought his mind was going.

‘Mr. Scott,’ I said soothingly, ‘you are hot and tired; you must come into the house’—

But he stopped me with a fierce gesture.

‘The house!’ he exclaimed. ‘Do you think I could go into the house? You would expect me to sit quietly and speak properly, I suppose,’ he added ironically. ‘Oh! when I think of it all, I am mad! What a confounded fool I have

been!' he cried, with increasing vehemence. 'Put Morton, at all events, shall answer for this! Let him look to himself if he meets me to-day.' And, muttering something I did not catch, he rushed away.

'Decidedly he is out of his mind,' thought I; and, hastening into the house, I sought for papa to tell him my fears; but unfortunately he had gone out to pay some visits in a distant part of the parish, and would not be home till dinner-time. I did not wish to alarm mama, and compelled myself perforce to be still; and, for the first time since my great calamity, I forgot my own misery, in the blow that seemed to be impending over my sister. As to what he had said about Morton having had to do with my grief, of course I set that down entirely to aberration of mind; for how could he or any one have had aught to do with *that*?

We had nearly finished dinner when papa came home; and it was more than an hour after that before I could see him without attracting the attention of the others.

'What is it, my dear?' said papa anxiously, when I asked to speak with him. I suppose he thought that some fresh grief had befallen me; and he was not greatly relieved when I told him of the new misfortune that threatened us. 'Oh dear, dear!' he said; 'can his mind be really wrong? I must go up immediately and ascertain.' And he went.

It was about seven o'clock now, and I could not help feeling very anxious as to what might have happened in the interval. It seemed very long before papa returned, and it was nearly twelve by the clock. It was well he had gone.

He had found Mr. Scott, he said, in a raging fever, and the servants troubled and excited, and not knowing what to do. He had sent off instantly for Dr. Blackburn, who had pronounced it brain fever, and said that it must have been hanging about him for some time; that of course at present it was impossible to say what might be the result,—the fever would have to run its course,—but that Mrs. Scott ought to be apprised without delay; and papa had accordingly telegraphed to Harriet.

This was not very cheering news. Papa went up again next morning before breakfast, and brought no better accounts of Mr. Scott. He told us that Harriet and her maid had just arrived,—having started the night before, immediately after receiving the telegram,—and that he thought Marianne ought to go up and see her, as she was in a sad state.

‘I think I should like to go too,’ I said, some hours after, when Marianne was putting on her hat to go to Dalmany; for in my weary and desolate state I eagerly grasped at any change—anything to keep myself from thinking.

‘Well, Ellie, do come,’ she said; ‘get your hat, dear.’

‘But are you sure you are able for it, Ellie dear?’ said mama doubtfully, glad to have me rouse myself, but evidently afraid of this. ‘What if you should meet any one there?’ and she stopped hesitatingly. I knew to whom she referred, and it struck me painfully. Then I remembered that it was not probable at that hour.

‘*He* will not be there just now, mama,’ I said: ‘it is his hour for seeing patients at home.’ And we went.

Mr. Scott’s sudden and dangerous illness had roused me effectually for the time being; and, though we scarcely spoke during our walk (Marianne and I), I observed with some degree of interest the rural sights and sounds around me,—feeling that the shade of the trees, and the sweet-scented air, as well as the playful frisking of the deer and other animals in the sunshine, were still pleasant to me. A rather disagreeable awakening, however, awaited me at the end of our walk. Mr. Morton was standing before the door when we came up to it, in evident altercation with the servant. He was demanding admittance, and the man was as determinedly refusing it.

He turned when he saw us, and raised his hat.

‘Miss Fitz-James,’ he said, addressing Marianne, ‘you have just come in time to bear witness to this fellow’s insolence. He most unwarrantably refuses me admittance to Mr. Scott, and I cannot understand the meaning of it.’

Marianne could not enlighten him either.

‘Mr. Scott is very ill, unable to see any one,’ she said.

‘He would see me,’ said Mr. Morton resolutely. ‘I would take charge of him, and attend him night and day; and who has a better right than I?—an old friend, and who has served him faithfully all these years.’

This was pathetic, and Marianne seemed to feel it so, as she looked sympathetic. I did not quite know what to make of it myself, and remained silent, especially as Mr. Morton did not address me by word or look. The man, who still held the door in his hand, now interposed, and, respectfully addressing Marianne, said that he had Mrs. Scott’s positive orders not to admit Mr. Morton.

Mr. Morton looked desperate.

‘Would you oblige me,’ he said, again turning to Marianne, ‘by having a message conveyed to Mrs. Scott, that I request to know the meaning of this treatment of her husband’s old and faithful servant? I am quite sure Mrs. Scott never gave such an order.’

The man smiled derisively; and Marianne, wishing to end this unpleasant scene, said she would take the message. The man held the door open for us to enter, when Mr. Morton, not choosing to wait the somewhat dubious result of a message, took the opportunity of pressing in along with us. The servant hesitated for a moment.

‘Well, ma’am,’ he then said civilly, ‘I had positive orders against admitting Mr. Morton; and if Mrs. Scott is displeased, you will bear me out that I am not to blame.’

But Mr. Morton seemed to have no intention of accompanying us to Mrs. Scott’s presence, as he branched off in another direction. The man, however, quickly intercepted him.

‘You don’t go there anyhow,’ said he, ‘without Mrs. Scott’s orders.’

So Mr. Morton followed us into the drawing-room.

The room was empty, and the minute we waited there with Mr. Morton was not pleasant. He had the air of a martyr, and certainly the resolution of one also; as, when a message was brought that ‘Mrs. Scott declined to see Mr. Morton, and requested the ladies to come to her in the library,’ we rose,

and, to our surprise, Mr. Morton rose also, apparently with the intention of accompanying us.

‘You aren’t coming with the ladies now,’ said the man, pausing; ‘I tell you, Mrs. Scott won’t see you.’

‘I shall see her, then,’ said he firmly, walking forward.

Marianne stopped.

‘Really, Mr. Morton,’ she said, ‘this is most ungentlemanly conduct. If Mrs. Scott does not wish to see you, why force yourself upon her?’

Mr. Morton’s only reply was by folding his arms with an air of dogged resolution, as he waited for us to proceed.

What was to be done? Several servants had now collected in the corridor, and Mr. Morton’s chance of holding out amongst them was small; but he still persisted.

‘Shall you enter first, or shall I?’ he asked, addressing Marianne, who had become quite pale, and looked ready to drop.

I thought it time now to speak.

‘Mr. Morton,’ I said, ‘you know as well as I do how distasteful your presence would be to Mr. Scott; and you certainly shall not annoy Mrs. Scott at present, by intruding on her against her wish’—

He turned upon me like a wild animal at bay.

‘*You* had better not take part against me, young lady,’ said he. ‘I hold that which may be more than life or death to you. You have got me into a pretty mess, you and your husband together; and, if you had not worried and tormented my life out, you would not have been in this mess yourselves.’

This before the wondering servants!

‘I don’t understand what you allude to, Mr. Morton,’ I said; ‘but at all events you will be good enough to understand that your presence is not desired in this house, and that you must withdraw at once.’

At this moment Harriet appeared at the door of the library, looking very pale, but resolute, as she could be on occasion.

‘Why do you stand here?’ she said, taking my hand, and taking no notice of Mr. Morton. ‘Why don’t you come in?’

He saved us the trouble of replying, however.

‘Mrs. Scott,’ he began excitedly, ‘may I inquire what is the meaning of the treatment I have been subjected to at the hands of your servants? I am here this morning by Mr. Scott’s orders, and I find that you deny me admittance to him. I wish to know the reason.’

‘Mr. Scott, as you must be aware, is totally unable at present to see any one on business,’ said Harriet steadily, though I could see she was inwardly shaking.

‘Be good enough to answer my question, madam,’ he said, growing more and more vehement. ‘Is there any reason why I should have been so insolently refused admittance into the house, where I have come and gone for the last dozen years? When yesterday, too?’—

‘Mr. Morton,’ said Harriet, becoming very pale as she spoke, ‘I heard the particulars of your interview yesterday; and Dr. Blackburn tells me it is at the risk of Mr. Scott’s life that you should be allowed to see him.’

‘Did you hear *all* the particulars of that interview?’ he asked, with sneering emphasis. ‘But, waiving that,’ he added, suddenly changing his tone to one of business, ‘am I to say what I have to say to you in public here’ (looking round upon the servants and me), ‘or in private? and I warn you it had better be the latter.’

I whispered Harriet to send away the servants, as Mr. Morton would not have scrupled to say anything; but she took no heed. I suppose she was afraid to do so, Mr. Morton looked altogether so dangerous.

‘Certainly I do not speak to you in private, Mr. Morton,’ she said, with quiet decision.

‘Ah!’ he said, bowing with mock reverence. ‘Well, then (since you have chosen), let me tell you—as the best friend you ever had—that as sure as there is a Heaven above us, if you permit Dr. Blackburn’s attendance on your husband, you will rue the day with your latest breath.’

At this most infamous libel, insinuated only as it was, every one stood aghast. But he went on with increasing vehemence,—

‘If you value your husband’s life and your own position, I adjure you to dismiss Dr. Blackburn. Get some other medical man—any one—I care not whom; but as long as *he* remains with Mr. Scott you are on the very verge of ruin, both of you. It is as a friend I warn you.’

Harriet gazed at him speechless; and there were suppressed exclamations of wonder and excitement among the servants at these most extraordinary assertions; and I—perhaps in my most miserable position I ought to have been silent, but I would not succumb to such dastardly cowardice. Truly Mr. Morton was a fiend in the likeness of man! But I constrained myself to speak calmly.

‘Mr. Morton,’ I said, ‘no one who knows Dr. Blackburn will pay any heed to your most vile insinuations; but, having said all that you have to say, I request that you will now relieve us of your presence. You have forced yourself in against Mrs. Scott’s express orders, and you will now be good enough to withdraw.’

‘What! do *you* defend him?’ said he, wheeling round to me, and conveniently ignoring the latter part of my speech. ‘He has wronged you enough, I am sure.’

‘He *never* wronged me,’ I said, ‘by word or deed; and I begin now to believe what Mr. Scott told me yesterday, that *you* knew more of that affair than any one else’—

I stopped short; what impelled me to utter this hasty and intemperate speech I know not, for I had attached no meaning to the charge; but it had an electrical effect on Mr. Morton. He first flushed violently, then became of a ghastly paleness, and staggered back some paces, as if he had received a blow.

‘Ha!’ he uttered, looking me full in the face in his astonishment, — ‘he told you *that*, did he? then he must have been stark-mad yesterday, and I did not think so. But, bah!’ he continued, his natural audacity returning in some degree, and getting up an ironical smile; ‘I doubt you must have heard wrong—we must make great allowances for your deficiencies at present; he was hardly so mad as that yesterday.’



At this moment a peal at the bell was heard, and a servant hastened forward and admitted Sir James Elphinstone. Never did good angel appear more opportunely—never before had I rejoiced to see his cold, impassive countenance! He looked in astonishment at the group in the corridor, at me and at Harriet, who trembled visibly, and showed signs of great agitation.

‘Mrs. Scott,’ he said, taking her hand and speaking soothingly, ‘what is all this?’

Harriet recovered herself wonderfully, now that Sir James was here.

‘Mr. Morton can best answer that,’ she said.

Sir James looked at him.

Mr. Morton’s reply was by a repetition of the warning he had already given Harriet, coupled with his extraordinary insinuations against Dr. Blackburn.

‘Dr. Blackburn!’ repeated Sir James, in astonishment, glancing for a moment at me: ‘I would trust my life in Dr. Blackburn’s hands any day.’

‘You might have more than life at stake, Sir James,’ said Mr. Morton, steadily confronting him.

‘The fellow is a maniac,’ muttered Sir James; ‘what do you mean, Johnstone, by allowing him to stand there?’ he said, angrily addressing the butler.

Several pairs of hands were at once laid on Mr. Morton, but he shook them off.

‘There is no necessity for that,’ he said, with dignity; ‘I am going—I would not remain. Only give me the assurance that Mr. Scott will be safe, by being placed in other hands than Dr. Blackburn’s, and I go at once.’

‘You have had my answer,’ said Sir James haughtily; ‘I desire no better advice for Mr. Scott, or for myself either, than my friend Dr. Blackburn’s.’

‘Then you will only repent it once, Sir James,’ he cried, ‘and that will be always;’ and, with a menacing gesture towards the assemblage in general, he left the house.

The servants dispersed, and we entered the library, where Sir James composedly, and without any allusion to what had

passed, greeted us all formally, inquired for his nephew, and, saying he would go up himself and see him, quitted the room.

Perturbed as we all three were by the recent scene, we were not disposed for much conversation. Besides, I was anxious to go before Sir James returned. I felt my position keenly; indeed I was now feeling that I had done very wrong to come at all. To have been exposed, in my worse than widowhood, to the curiosity of servants, the insolence of Mr. Morton, and even the cold gaze of strangers, was more than I could bear; and I was only anxious to hasten home, resolving, in my torn and lacerated heart, never again to emerge from its safe sanctuary.

Mr. Scott was much the same; but Harriet seemed to think him very ill. She looked tired and dispirited herself, poor girl; and the scene with Mr. Morton had certainly not been beneficial. Marianne offered to remain with her; but Harriet said that I had more need of her, at least at present. She said we must not walk home, as that man might be lurking still on the road, and might insult us; and, ringing the bell, she ordered the carriage.

Harriet made no allusion to my own particular grief—I saw she could not; but her looks, and a silent pressure of the hand, said more than any words could have done.

‘You will not allow that man’s insinuations to prejudice you against—against *him*?’ I whispered, kissing her, as we went away.

‘Ellie!’ she said, with a reproachful look; ‘do I not know Dr. Blackburn?’

The days went on, bringing no amendment to Mr. Scott; and we waited anxiously for the crisis. My nineteenth birthday was passed in sadness and sorrow,—a sad, sad contrast in almost all respects to the previous year! And Sir John’s birthday also, almost for the first time since his boyhood, was allowed to pass unmarked. In the deadly illness of his young friend, and the distress of all connected with him, they most fully sympathized; and the party to which he had so joyously invited us all was postponed to a more appropriate season. I

had never repeated my visit; nor, indeed, ventured beyond the Manse gates; and as mama, at Harriet's wish, had gone to be with her at Dalmany (as she was not admitted to her husband's room at present, and was very sad, poor girl), and Marianne was also a good deal there, I tried as far as possible to interest myself in household matters, and supply their place. *She* was now far on her way by this time; but I had nought to do, thinking of her, still less of *him*. My affections and interests were once more shut up—or ought to have been—in my childhood's home. I tried—tried hard—not to let them stray beyond; but, as *he* had said, 'the flesh was weak.' Mr. Morton we had never seen since that day at Dalmany; but we heard that he was constantly lurking about near the house,—whether in dread of some dire catastrophe happening there, or what, was best known to himself.

The Edinburgh physicians called in by Dr. Blackburn coincided in his opinion that Mr. Scott's was a 'very grave case.' A great man came out from Edinburgh every day, who looked at the unconscious patient over his spectacles; and whatever he might say to his coadjutors in the bedroom, he had always something polite and cheering to say to Harriet—which was very kind of him, I am sure. But I afterwards learned that this benignant old gentleman was very far from considering that virtue is its own reward; and I suspect that, notwithstanding all the charm that was supposed to exist in the eyes of this Æsculapius, Mr. Scott's chance of recovery would have been small but for the unremitting care and attention of Dr. Blackburn. At Harriet's urgent desire, he took up his residence at Dalmany, rendering the nurse's post almost a sinecure by night, and looking in as frequently during the day as his duties elsewhere admitted. When he rested himself was a consideration to which he seemed to attach no importance whatever. Ah me! what had *I* to do with him now? and yet it gave me a thrill of pleasure to know that it was to him, and to none other, that my sister looked in this her time of trial. And so, as I said, heavily passed the days.



## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE CRISIS.

'But now it has fallen from me,  
It is buried in the sea,  
And only the sorrows of others  
Cast their shadows over me.'



HE night of the crisis came, and our anxiety was at its height. Harriet had been in a frightful state of grief all along; and during the long silent hours of that night I lay awake, thinking of her, and wondering how she would bear it.

The morning dawned, a dazzlingly bright autumn morning. I could not rest in bed; and, on going down-stairs at eight o'clock, I heard from Nurse that, as no tidings from Dalmany had come, papa had got alarmed, and had gone up to inquire. I sat down by the open window, while Betsy was setting breakfast, to inhale the fresh morning air and watch for his return.

I had not waited long when I saw a gentleman coming up through the gates. At first I thought it was papa returned already; but a second glance made my heart leap almost as if it would burst its bonds,—it was Dr. Blackburn.

For a second I thought only of him; the next, I thought could he have come to break the worst to us—that my sister was indeed a widow? His face was grave; yet joy was in his eye, and his step was light—a different man altogether he looked from what I had seen him last! He saw me at the window, and came round. Ah! why did he come to me?—he might have known I could not bear it. He did more,

however : he clasped me in his arms, and kissed me, through the open window ; and, oh !—was it not all a dream ?—he called me *wife* ! I thought he had forgotten himself altogether ; but how could I draw myself away from *him* ?

Nurse came bustling into the room with part of the breakfast, and started when she saw Dr. Blackburn. She did not speak, however—only laid down what she had in her hand, and left the room.

‘Come out here and speak to me, Ellie,’ he said ; and I went, never doubting that what he told me to do was right.

He met me at the door, drew my hand through his arm, and led me into the garden.

‘How is Mr. Scott ?’ I had asked twice before he answered.

‘The crisis of the fever is past, and there is hope, so far,’ was the answer ; ‘but, Ellie, I have made a strange and terrible discovery last night,—terrible in one sense, but not for us—not for us, my darling wife !’

I looked at him, hearing, but not realizing his words. He went on hurriedly,—

‘You remember the gentleman I told you about, whom I suspected of leading astray the ill-fated Catharine Gourlay ? You knew who he was ?’

‘Mr. Scott ?’ I said faintly ; it seemed so hard at that moment to think of him as other than he ought to be.

‘It is more than we thought—*she is his wife* !’

I grasped his arm convulsively.

‘His wife ?’ I repeated, taking in the sense with difficulty, and the one idea that darted through my brain to the exclusion of all else was, ‘Harriet like me.’ We were both silent for a minute or two. Then I felt a choking, sickening feeling come over me, as if everything was receding, and I had almost fallen ; but he caught me, and placed me in a garden-chair, his arm still round me.

‘Don’t be frightened, darling ; you will be better presently,’ he whispered.

And I did revive soon,—oh, to such happiness !—and then, sitting on the rustic seat, still supported by him, he told me all.

‘I saw from the very first, of course, Ellie,’ he began, ‘that his illness was caused by something that lay heavily on his mind, and the second day I was with him I guessed what it was. He raved incessantly for a day or two about his wife, and that some one was taking her from him; your name and my own, Ellie, seemed strangely intermingled, and also Morton’s; the latter he seemed to imagine the very devil himself! and from what I saw of him this morning, the appellation is not far wrong. Of course, I attached no importance to ravings, except that it showed the general tenor of his thoughts; but it certainly was curious, especially as once or twice came out *the* name—*her* name; and, having already more than suspicions to go upon, I began to take some heed. Once or twice in his intervals of consciousness I might have questioned him; but I would not take such an advantage; and, indeed, at such moments I was obliged to keep in the background, as my presence seemed to excite him beyond everything. Almost from the second day it had been my impulse to keep Mrs. Scott as much as possible from the room; for, besides his being very, very ill, his ravings, unconnected as they were, might have been a revelation to her.

‘Last night came the crisis,—the crisis, Ellie, of more than one thing! All last evening, and a great part of the night, he had slept calmly—so calmly, in fact, that an inexperienced eye might naturally enough have thought him gone; but he slept on till long past the dawn. They were all sitting up in the library,—for who could sleep?—and I sent them tidings from time to time. As I said, he slept till long past the dawn, when he awoke—infantile in weakness, of course, but quite conscious. He took some little time to collect himself, and then (when I was about to administer a restorative) I suppose his extreme weakness induced the belief that he was fast sinking; for, as well as he was able, he began to thank me for what he called my kindness to him, muttering something unintelligible about “coals of fire.” I told him in a word or two—for he could not bear many—that I would get all that afterwards; that he was better, and I trusted he would yet be raised up to praise

the Lord for all His mercies. But he did not seem to seize the idea of recovery, his mind seemed rather running upon death. Presently he said, in his weak, faint voice, that he had something to say that he could not die without having said, and wished Sir James Elphinstone to be sent for immediately. I told him that Sir James was in the house, but that he had better wait till he was a little stronger—at least, till the morning; but he grew so excited at my contradiction, that I thought it better to humour him; and though I knew the crisis was past, and that he might yet do well, I went for Sir James. I reassured him by telling him that his nephew was certainly better, but that he did not think so himself, and that we must humour him; and the old gentleman followed me.

‘Of course, I did not accompany him into the sick-room, but waited in the adjoining one. I went to the window. It was daylight now, Ellie—a glorious morning; and I thought of the dawn of hope that had broken upon that household, from darkness and despair; and, ungrateful that I was! I felt the contrast of my own unchanging gloom a little too vividly. I thought of you, Ellie,—I knew you would not sleep on such a night,—and I wondered if you were thinking of me. I little thought how soon I was to call you mine again!

‘My meditations were interrupted by Sir James’s entrance. He looked perturbed and excited—unusually so for him. As he drew a chair to the table and sat down, I asked if Mr. Scott were asleep, and he said yes. Of course, I had no business with the revelation, whatever it was, and was going to return to my patient, but Sir James motioned me to remain, and, after a preliminary cough,—

“Dr. Blackburn,” he began, in his formal manner, “really this is a most unpleasant affair; had you any idea of it when you called me?”

‘Of course, I was altogether in the dark what he was at, and said so.

“Then, of course,” he went on, “as a party concerned, I must acquaint you with it.”

‘And then he told me the few words only that his nephew

had been able to utter (sufficiently startling they were), and uttered on what he seemed convinced was the verge of another world. They were to the effect that he had persuaded the girl Gourlay to elope with him to Scotland (that was at the time of her disappearance from Lady Jane's—before he was of age) to an obscure northern town, which none of his acquaintances were ever likely to visit; where, after a ceremony (consisting simply of an exchange of documents, acknowledging each other as husband and wife, which completely satisfied her, but to which, it is needless to say, *he* attached not the slightest importance), they took up their abode at the principal hotel as a married couple. It appears also that while there, he had, during a temporary absence, addressed her through the post as “Mrs. Scott” (attaching no meaning to the act), besides writing her name, “Catherine Scott,” on an album and a “Book of Beauty” he had given her during his short-lived affection,—all of which, according to Scottish law, constituted as firm a marriage as the most regular forms could have made it; though, as I said, *he* did not know this until long afterwards. A very few weeks of this unpromising union sufficed to disenchant him (and he did not find it difficult to persuade his unfortunate dupe that she had been deceived from the first); and the girl, thus deserted, and nearly heart-broken,—though liberally enough provided for in other respects,—returned to London. Her subsequent history you know, Ellie,’ he added, with a hot flush of indignation; while the indignant blood mounted to my very forehead, to think how my honourable and noble-minded husband had been imposed upon, and I felt that a just retribution had indeed fallen upon Mr. Scott.

‘One man only knew the real facts of the case, and that was Morton; and this it was that constituted the hold he has so long held over Mr. Scott; though of that the latter was entirely ignorant until some weeks after his second marriage. So far Sir James told me,’ continued my husband, ‘and then, prompt and energetic in all his proceedings, insisted on at once sending for Morton, and having the whole matter sifted to the



bottom. I suggested that in Mr. Scott's critical state, and in consideration for Mrs. Scott, he should defer the proposed investigation ; but he shook his head impatiently, and said that in such a case where was the use of delay, and insisted on sending then and there.

‘ I suppose Morton knew pretty well the reason of his being summoned, though he affected an air of total unconsciousness. However, when he found that it was all up, and that his dismissal was certain, he turned round and made a great merit of having kept the secret so long and so faithfully, and politely informed us of all the particulars we chose to ask—or rather Sir James,—I asked none.

‘ It appeared that on the eventful day on which *she* disappeared from my house, she had seen, in the morning papers, the details of a disputed marriage-case (then in prominent litigation) closely resembling her own ; and the idea had at once taken possession of her to have her rights as Mrs. Scott established ; and with that intention she and her aunt had called on Mr. Scott, as I had seen. Mr. Scott, who was then on the eve of departing for the Continent, had cut short the interview—ridiculing her claims, and utterly refusing to acknowledge them.

‘ They had then, in an evil hour for themselves, sought out Morton, who, it appears, was an old acquaintance of the aunt's, and who chanced to be in London at the time. He investigated their claims, and at once saw his advantage ; but, like a true Jesuit (as he is, Ellie), he kept his own counsel, possessing himself, however, of the proofs which they had furnished. He told them to leave the whole matter to him, and he would see them righted. He established them in lodgings at Richmond to wait the issue, and secretly took measures to have the case tested ; and he found, as he had surmised from the first, that it was indisputable. That he saw his way clearly from the first, there is no room to doubt ; and we must concede him no small measure of acumen to concoct and carry out such a plot.

‘ It did not, however, consort with his plans to have the girl acknowledged by her husband immediately. No ; his

scheme was deeper—one which, from its diabolical nature, the prince of fiends himself might have devised. In saying that he is a Jesuit, Ellie, I give you the key to his whole character. He saw that, with the proofs of this marriage in his possession, he had a hold over two persons—one of them one of the most considerable landowners in the kingdom. He gave no hint to Mr. Scott of what had come to his knowledge, and of course none to me, but waited his time. Hence the events which followed—hence his unconcealed exultation at Mr. Scott's marriage (which you will remember, Ellie); and hence, at a later period, at ours. His power over Mr. Scott was, as I have said, made known to him early enough—as soon as it had been consolidated beyond all risk; and we know how he has since used that power. Scott's existence since that time must have been a living *misery* (indeed he said so); the only wonder now is that he could have borne up so long under it.

‘Of course Morton must have procured the letters containing the nefarious falsehoods regarding the girl's death (though he refused to make any admissions as to that); the end aimed at—the good of his Church—justifying the most villainous means, according to his views. *He* also must, of course, have afterwards dictated the letter to her father, which you saw. And I ought to have said that, in order to have her quite removed beyond the reach, either of her father or of me, he had at once conveyed them to a convent in Canada, where they were treated with the greatest consideration, and every effort made to proselytize them,—till his time to make further use of them should come.’

It was an astounding revelation, and I could only gaze in blank astonishment in my husband's face.

‘But I don't quite see what object he gained in coming between *us*,’ I said at last, when he had paused for some minutes.

‘Don't you see, Ellie? He had got it into his head that I was the great obstacle to the success of his proselytizing in the parish (his chief object in all these various plots), and that if I were once removed all would go to his mind. Of course

that was absurd, but he thought it ; and of course he also knew that, had the recent miserable state of affairs continued, you and I could not have remained in the same parish, Ellie. I must have placed the safeguard of distance between myself and you.'

'Yes,' I said, shuddering, and grasping his arm tighter ; 'but that is all over now, is it not ?'

'Yes, my darling !' he said, drawing me closer to him. 'God be thanked, it is over now—for *us*,' he added gravely.

Ah yes !—for us ! Selfish that I was ! I had forgotten that, my poor, poor Harriet !

'What will she do ?' I cried.

But he only shook his head.

'But, William,' I continued, as a thought struck me, 'how was the girl induced to forego her claims to be Mrs. Scott of Dalmany (when it was only the position she cared for), and consent to return as Mrs. Blackburn ?'

'That is very easily accounted for, Ellie. They were simple, ignorant people, both the aunt and she,—completely in Morton's hands, to sway them as he would. He had taken up their cause and shown them a deal of kindness ; and how were they to know that he was not really their friend ? Besides, he always deluded them with the belief that he was gradually overcoming every obstacle, and paving the way for the establishment of her rights ; and you know he had a precedent to go upon in excusing the delay, in the case before referred to, which was still in litigation. But beyond and above all that, they had, as you know, by the ceaseless efforts made by their "guardians," been at last gained over to the faith of the convent ; and when it was constantly represented to them what splendid advantages they could secure for their Church by simply consenting to act under guidance, we cannot wonder that their weak minds succumbed to the influence, and that they became easy tools for Morton's purposes. And there is little doubt, Ellie, that, had the truth not come out, as it has, they would not long have been suffered to remain with their friends ; but, as soon as one of his objects had been achieved

in my banishment from the place, he would have effectually secured them, to prevent the possibility of their betraying any of his secrets. *That* guilt is spared him. But you see how he has outwitted himself, Ellie, as wicked people always do; for in his malice and resentment against me, he has accomplished his own ruin! All his sixteen years of waiting—his schemes and plots—all go for nothing—and himself an object of opprobrium and just contempt to every one.'

I scarcely heard the last words—Harriet was all I could think of.

'Oh, William,' I cried, clasping his arm with both my hands, 'my poor, poor Harriet! it will kill her! William, it is worse for her than for me.'

'Yes,' was all the answer.

'Oh, *must* she be told?' I gasped in agony, at the thought of all that was yet before us.

'How can it possibly be concealed?' he asked quickly, looking at me as if he had read my thought.

My eyes fell before his.

'If we—if we,' I stammered,—'we know what we are to other,—could we not go on—for a little'—

'Hush, Ellie,' and he closed my lips; 'we must not do evil that good may come.' And I felt he was right.

'It would not make her happy, child,' he added, stroking my hair sadly and fondly. 'It would be wrong in us, and the truth would reach her sooner or later. No, no, my Ellie! *we* can do nothing but leave her in the hands of Him who "tempers the wind to the shorn lamb," and who alone can do aught for her.'

My tears were my only answer, and there was a long silence.

My husband and I never once spoke of when I should come home. In the unutterable woe that was coming on those dear to us, how could we intrude our own happiness? He told me that in the event of Mr. Scott's death Harriet would at least be well provided for in regard to pecuniary affairs,—splendidly provided for,—Mr. Scott having arranged that, as soon as he

became aware of the wrong he had unwittingly done her; and his great anxiety to see Sir James Elphinstone that morning had been to pledge him to see all his arrangements for her duly and properly carried into effect. But I could listen to nothing of that sort just now. Several times during it all, I had seen Marianne and also Nurse looking from the windows, wondering, no doubt, as of course they must, at the length of the interview, or even at the interview itself; and I was sorry that they should misunderstand us, even for a moment. But that was a secondary consideration.

Then my husband rose.

‘I must hasten back to my patient,’ he said. ‘I know not how I may find him, after all this agitation.’

‘Does mama know?’ I asked, still retaining his hand.

‘No, I have told no one but you, Ellie, and Sir James would not, I am certain. But I fear Morton will publish it out of revenge, now that all motive for concealment is over. Sir James agrees with me that Harriet must know nothing of it till all danger for the patient is over.’

‘And that over, he cares nothing for the danger to her,’ I murmured; but the querulous speech was hushed in a moment, before his gentle yet reproachful glance.

‘Papa went up to Dalmany an hour ago,’ I cried, in sudden consternation. ‘Will there be no danger of his hearing it?’

‘Well, perhaps Sir James may tell *him*,’ he said reflectively. ‘In that case I had better hasten back at once. Sir James is so sternly honourable and decided in all his dealings, that he may not deem it right to keep it from your father even for a day, and I may be able to soften the blow a little.’

I went with him to the gate, and with another long, loving embrace, so full of joy to ourselves, though of sorrow to others, we parted.





## CHAPTER XXIV.

### RELIEF.

‘Trust in that veiled hand that leads  
None by the way that they would go.’



**O**F course I could not keep all this from Marianne and Tom ; and their consternation at the turn matters had taken was unbounded.

‘Well,’ was Tom’s characteristic reflection, ‘you see that’s what comes of such “swell” marriages, and running off with a man she knew nothing about ! He might have had a dozen wives, for what she knew ! You are all right again, at any rate, Ellie,’ he said, giving me a great squeeze by way of congratulation.

I really wondered he could speak at all, Marianne could not, certainly ; and between the kisses she tried to give me, and her tears for Harriet, she was in a sad state, poor girl !

We were still sitting over our untasted breakfast, when papa returned. One glance at his face told us he had heard all. But who first broke the silence, or how we passed that terrible day, none of us could ever remember.

Before night we learned that, whether through Mr. Morton or the servants at Dalmany, the unhappy story was already all over the village. We thought it unlikely that Mr. Morton would have done so already, to his own prejudice, even to gratify his malice and revenge. The more probable solution was that it had got wind through the servants, who are always quick-sighted enough to perceive when anything is amiss in a household, and who had been witnesses of Mr. Morton’s extra-

ordinary behaviour a few days before. More than that : Nurse told us that a mob of the village people, both from Colston and Colmuir End, led on by Robbie Gourlay, 'whose heid,' Nurse said, 'was fair turn't' (no wonder, by the tidings he had heard), had burned Morton in effigy on the road ; during which exciting process Morton himself had unfortunately passed, whereupon they had seized him without hesitation, and, taking vengeance into their own hands, had ducked him in the horsepond, till he had taken an oath to vacate the neighbourhood for ever. They would give him three days' grace, to demit his charge into the hands of Sir James Elphinstone, and bundle out, bag and baggage ; but if, at the end of that time, he were found to have neglected their warning, and to be hovering anywhere near Colston, he had better look to himself.

Retribution had already overtaken Mr. Morton !

More Nurse added, which was not quite so justifiable. A detachment of the mob, growing bold with impunity (but, I am glad to say, *not* headed by Robbie), had proceeded to the chapel at Dalmany, and had begun to sack it—had already demolished the 'screen,' and were proceeding, in zealous emulation of John Knox, to inflict summary vengeance on the 'saints,' when Dr. Blackburn, passing up from his 'rounds' to Dalmany, was attracted by the tumult, and, representing to them the lawlessness of their conduct, had fortunately succeeded in dispersing them quietly, and without further damage. Colston was in a state of excitement very nearly approaching our own ; and Nurse informed us that the tide of popular feeling ran high in sympathy with 'the Minister's twa daughters.'

All this time, she upon whom the blow would most heavily fall was as yet unconscious of her impending doom—her anxieties all concentrated on him she thought her husband, and who still hovered between life and death. The fever, indeed, was gone, but his state of prostration was frightful ; and Dr. Blackburn, sanguine as he generally was, trembled visibly for the result. The medical men, consulting the safety

of both, still carefully kept Harriet excluded from the sick-room, only permitting her to look at her husband when he was asleep ; and as mama, almost prostrate beneath this second blow (which we had not been able to keep from her), was incapable of supporting Harriet, and Marianne's sympathetic looks must have betrayed the secret at once, I had taken mama's place at Dalmany the very evening of the discovery, in attendance on my poor sister. But it was almost more than I could bear myself. I had nothing to fear now from compromising myself, in the world's eyes, by residing under the same roof with Dr. Blackburn—my whole story being as well known in the neighbourhood as it was to myself. But Harriet—Harriet, poor girl, had taken my place in becoming food for gossip, with its thousand tongues,—which tongues were already loud in wonder 'why we were not removing her from Dalmany,' where she had no longer any right to be.

Papa was in great distress and doubt whether we ought not to tell her at once, and have her taken home ; and it was only at the urgent entreaty, both of Dr. Blackburn and Sir James Elphinstone, on the patient's account,—should he by any chance have asked for her,—that he consented to wait a little. I almost wonder now that she did not learn it, notwithstanding all our precautions ; my very presence there might have betrayed something ; but perhaps, as the doctors thought, she was too stupefied with grief to think of anything but her husband. Once, however, she said to me, 'It is very good of you, Ellie dear, to come to me ; but are you sure you can bear it?' alluding, I suppose, to Dr. Blackburn being in the house.

My only answer was a silent pressure of the hand.

Oh, those three days ! how did they ever drag their slow lengths along ! The very servants, it seemed to me, wondered how long we meant to remain—though, I daresay, this was but imagination. Her maid, poor thing, was loud in her sympathy to me, when she could do so unobserved by Harriet. She said she would never part from her dear mistress, and would follow her to the Manse, if we would allow her. But I could not look



forward to that. Fearfully was Mr. Scott's wrong-doing being visited upon him and his !

But in this case, mercifully for us, the innocent were not to suffer along with the guilty. Even now the day was breaking, and the shadows were fleeing away, although we knew it not.

It was the evening of the third day ; a slight amendment was visible in the patient, and Harriet, poor girl, on the strength of this revived hope, had thrown herself on a sofa in her dressing-room, utterly exhausted with all she had undergone, and had fallen into a sound sleep.

I was sitting by her, wondering how much longer she would enjoy such blissful unconsciousness. The convalescence of her 'husband,' as she thought him, which she was praying for so earnestly, would, I feared, be her own death-blow. The grief which I *might* have borne, Harriet never could ; and besides—it was different with her ! *That* was the fear that had prostrated mama, and that made even papa, strong man as he was, almost unable to remain in her presence,—my poor Harriet !

I was buried in these reflections—my eyes riveted on the quiet sleeper by my side—when Alice (Harriet's maid) came noiselessly into the room, and whispered me that a messenger from the Manse was waiting in the housekeeper's room to see me. Motioning the girl to take my place, and dreading I knew not what, I hastened down to find Nurse, in such a state of excitement that she could scarcely tell an intelligible story. All I could make out for some time was that 'Miss Marianne had sent her.' At last I gathered that the whole village was in a ferment at the news that had come in that afternoon, that the *Arcturus* (the vessel in which Robbie's daughter had sailed), after having come safely across the Atlantic, had been wrecked on our own shores ; that more than half the passengers had been drowned—and among the number, it was rumoured (on good authority, too), were the girl Gourlay and her aunt ; that Robbie had started at once to ascertain the truth of this ; and that, at his own request, papa had accompanied him, to assist in the investigation, leaving strict injunctions that, if

possible, it was to be kept perfectly quiet from us at Dalmany till he ascertained.

‘But,’ added Nurse, her eyes glistening, poor body, ‘Miss Marianne and me was speakin’ aboot it ; an’ she thoct *ye* wad like to ken, Miss Heelen, an’ sae did I ; sae I jist cam’ trottin’ off.’

Well, it was news ! I had to press my hand on my beating heart, to still the wild tumult there. But I could hardly be grateful to them for sending—the suspense, till the tidings were confirmed, one way or another, would be awful. But I thanked poor dear old Nurse, of course ; and, hearing from her that mama was better,—without staying to hear her additional information that ‘the haill parish could dae naething for hopin’ it micht be true, for Miss Harrit’s sake,’—I left her to the kind attentions of the housekeeper, and hastened upstairs, traversing the long gallery in the direction of the sick-room, in the hope of seeing my husband.

I met Mr. Scott’s valet coming out of the room, and, desiring him to call out Dr. Blackburn, I breathlessly told my husband all I had heard. It was no news to him, however. He had heard it all some hours before.

‘But I am sorry you have heard it, Ellie,’ he said gravely, ‘as I know what the suspense for you will be ; and, you know, it may be a mistake after all. Dr. Fitz-James will telegraph as soon as possible, and we must just wait ; you know, Ellie, where to look for strength.’

Ay, wait, wait—but it was hard. He led me back to the door of the dressing-room, and, with a kiss which strengthened me for much, he left me.

Harriet still slept peacefully ; and, with feelings at least diverted into a different channel, I again sat down beside her, to wait with what patience I might till the morning. It seemed so dreadful to be hoping to hear of the death of a fellow-creature ! Yet that was what we were all virtually doing ! I hated myself for the thought ; but drive it away I *could* not. Poor, pretty, giddy Kitty, whom I remembered so well !—what had she not caused to both of us ? Yet to be

wishing to hear she was drowned was so inexpressibly dreadful! And yet, again,—human nature was strong,—*what a release* it would be!

That night I never thought of going to bed, still less of sleep. Dr. Blackburn had said papa would be sure to telegraph in the morning, as soon as certainty had been arrived at, one way or another—and till then I could not rest. Harriet never once awoke. I sent the maid to bed, and watched by her alone during all the hours of that weary night. Once or twice my husband came to tell me that Mr. Scott continued the same, and was very glad to see that Harriet was asleep; but he never once touched on what the morning might bring, nor did I. But often and often, during those silent watches, my heart was lifted up to the Father and Lord of all, that in His own good time and way He would bring good out of this evil, whether we were smitten or healed. And when the morning at last came, and Alice returned to her post, and our breakfast was brought, I was still waiting—waiting.

Harriet awoke revived, and I gave her the cheering news that the patient was at least no worse; but the next moment I was sorry I had told her, as she got up immediately, and insisted on going at least to look into the room, and I had to use my utmost authority to prevent her, reminding her that she had given her hand to Dr. Blackburn in pledge that she would not attempt to see Mr. Scott until he gave her permission; but, as she seemed inclined to rebel, I went and brought Dr. Blackburn, who reassured her as to the patient's state (he could not, alas! say her husband), but firmly repeated his injunction that she must on no account attempt to see him that day, at least. He left us, and then we had our breakfast; and then another hour or two passed,—hours as long as days, it seemed to me,—when, happening to be at the window, I descried Tom coming down the avenue at a pace somewhat quicker than *his* deliberate wont. My heart bounded, for I saw he was the bearer of news of some sort, and making some excuse to Harriet I stole down-stairs, flew along the corridor, and met him as he entered.

‘What tidings?’ my eyes rather than my lips asked.

He held up the telegram without speaking; but the words danced before my eyes, and I could not read them.

‘Speak,’ I gasped, shaking him in my excitement.

‘She’s dead!’ said Tom, awestruck and appalled for once in his life.

But his feelings were lost upon me, for I remember nothing more but his dragging me to the outer door, and tearing off my collar and neck-ribbon, thinking I was fainting, while the servant who had admitted him, and who had been lingering in the corridor, ran for some water, and I soon revived.

‘Where is Blackburn, Ellie?’ Tom asked, when I could speak; ‘I must tell him.’

I sent a message to him to come to us, while I opened the telegram and read:—

‘Reverend Dr. Fitz-James, Port-na-cosh, to Mr. Fitz-James, Colston Manse.

‘Catherine Gourlay is amongst the drowned. Her father and I have identified the body. Apprise Mrs. Gourlay gently.’

Dr. Blackburn came down-stairs at this moment, and Tom went to him with the paper. When he had read it, he looked, as Tom had done, grave and awed—with a shade of yet deeper feeling.

‘Unfortunate girl!’ I heard him utter; and he folded the paper and gave it back to Tom, without a word.

Tom broke the silence.

‘I met Sir John when I was over at the Gourlays,’ he said, ‘and I showed him the message, and he said he would come up immediately. I’m sure I don’t know what for, but he says he’s coming.’

While he was speaking, I saw my husband was debating something with himself; and apparently he had decided the point, as, without saying anything to us, he turned and went up-stairs.

I told Tom that he must come up and see Harriet, and he said, ‘Oh, well, he might come *now*’ (Tom never voluntarily put himself in the way of great grief—at least where he was deeply

interested ; I suppose his feelings were too big for utterance) ; and he followed me up-stairs.

I half blamed myself, as I opened the door of Harriet's dressing-room, for not having cautioned him that we must keep the news we had just heard to ourselves : but I need not have feared for Tom ; he always knew what he was about, and greeted Harriet as if he had seen her yesterday, in his own half-gruff, half-kindly manner—which, however, she was well used to. She was in better spirits herself to-day, poor girl, with the hope that had revived for her that morning ; and she was much pleased to see Tom ; and while they were talking, I had time to recover myself a little from the tumult—not of sorrow, certainly (I could not say it)—into which the recent tidings had thrown me.

Presently a message came up that Sir John Maitland was in the library, and wished to see Mrs. Blackburn, and I left the room. Tom told me afterwards that Harriet had expressed her wonder to him at the name that had been given me ; and that it had appeared to strike her, for the first time, that my presence in the house at all was strange in the circumstances.

Tom had had to turn it off as well as he could.

Sir John congratulated me in his usual kind manner, and expressed his pleasure that our patient was at least not worse, as the servant had told him. He said he had wished to see my husband, but that he understood Dr. Brougham was with him at present ; and that he had come upon a little matter of business, which it was as well to attend to promptly. Then, after considering a little, he said it might perhaps be as well to see him before Dr. Brougham went away, and asked if I could send a message to him just now, to that effect. I did so, and presently Dr. Blackburn came down.

'Has he been told this news ?' asked Sir John, without circumlocution, as soon as they had shaken hands.

'Yes,' was the reply ; 'and I was almost afraid, at first, of the effect it had upon him ; but I think he will do well now.'

'I hope he will, I hope he will,' said Sir John, rubbing his

hands; 'but, meantime, we have another to see to; and, in case of the worst, Mrs. Scott must be made legally so without delay.' (Sir John, as formerly stated, was a Justice of Peace.)

'Poor fellow,' said my husband feelingly, 'he was terribly agitated for a few minutes; the first words he spoke were—"Bring my wife to me." It is the first time he has asked for her since his illness began. I think it would have killed him to have seen her before.'

'Oh, if he said that, it is nearly right already!' said Sir John, turning to me with a smile. 'But it is as well to make all secure before Brougham goes; isn't it, Mrs. Blackburn? I'll just take their declaration, and your father can give them a homily at his leisure, you know. But,' he added, 'by the way, how are we to manage with Mrs. Scott? I suppose she has known nothing of all this?'

'Nothing,' said Dr. Blackburn; 'but I think she will ask no questions; she will be too much occupied with seeing her husband again; for you must remember, Sir John, she has been rigidly excluded, poor thing, from the room all this time.'

'Then will you just go up and prepare him?' said Sir John. 'Or stay, perhaps I had better go with you, and see him before it; and also speak to Brougham.'

And away they went up-stairs, while I went back to Harriet.

'Is Sir John gone, Ellie?' she asked when I went in.

'No, he is speaking to the Doctor, and then, I think, he is coming up to see you.'

Tom was now going away, but I signed to him to stay, and presently Dr. Blackburn came in.

'Your husband is asking for you, Mrs. Scott,' he said; 'he is so much better to-day that Dr. Brougham and I think he may see you for a little.'

Harriet was somewhat agitated, as was but natural, and the glad tears started to her eyes.

'Is he really better?' I heard her say, as he led her away; 'do you think he will do well now?'

'Yes, I do,' was the cheering response. 'He is really better, but very, very weak; and I need not warn you to take care not to agitate him.'

'What's up now?' asked Tom, when they were gone.

I explained to him as well as I understood it myself, and in a few minutes Dr. Blackburn came back to tell us that it was all right now, and that Tom might take back the news to mama that Harriet was Mrs. Scott now, to all intents and purposes. And Tom went.

Dr. Blackburn told me their interview had been very short, and that Harriet had behaved with great firmness. Mr. Scott only kissed her once or twice, without speaking; and then, in his tremulous voice, told her that Sir John had a little matter of business for them to attend to, before he went away. And then Sir John came in,—and Dr. Brougham, and the butler, and housekeeper,—and the form was gone through,—and all was right. I drew a long breath of relief.

'And all is right now?' I said eagerly.

'Yes, all right now. To-morrow Dr. Fitz-James will give them "a homily," as Sir John says, and then it will be right in Church law too, you know. But I must go and bring Mrs. Scott away, or she will upset matters again; though,' he added with a smile (as he gave me the kiss he never forgot, for good-bye or greeting), 'I have no fear of him now.'

When Harriet came back, she looked like a different creature from what she had been in the morning, though she little knew all she had escaped. Evidently she did not understand the nature of the ceremony that had just passed, as she said 'It was so strange of Sir John to be pressing business matters on Mr. Scott at such a time; surely it was not like him.' But it was *very* like him, dear, kind, good Sir John.

The afternoon brought papa, terribly exhausted with the fatigues he had undergone and the scenes he had witnessed, and very much surprised, as well as pleased, of course, to hear of the ceremony that had taken place that day. He was not so prompt as Sir John, and had not thought of such a thing before the next day at soonest.

He told me that the bodies of Robbie's unfortunate daughter and his sister-in-law (who had also been drowned) had been brought home to the cottage. Poor Robbie, papa said, was in a sad state; and grieved mostly, as he expressed it, 'that Katie had died jist after tellin' sae mony lees.' Papa had tried to console him by saying that his daughter had been a tool in the hands of an artful and designing man; but this idea gave him little comfort. Up to the very last he had seemed to dread that Morton might be lurking somewhere about, and even yet come between him and his daughter's body, as he said, 'to play some ither trick, for the last;' and that had been his chief reason for begging papa to accompany him. If he ever remembered the deep and terrible interest which papa had in the event that caused *him* so much grief, it did not seem in any way to influence his feelings towards papa himself.

The scene altogether had been a fearful one,—more than half of the passengers drowned, and the place crowded with their friends, trying to identify the bodies. The tears and cries of some of them were heartrending; their grief being all the deeper, perhaps, that there was every reason to believe that the wreck had been caused by gross carelessness. There had been no storm, nor any appearance of one,—a lovely, calm summer night,—and the ship had struck not much more than a hundred yards from the shore. The captain and the mate had both been taken into custody. Altogether, papa said, the sight he had that day witnessed he could never, never forget.

And certainly he did not forget it that night, when, before he left us, he offered up before the assembled household a fervent, heartfelt thanksgiving for the mercy that had been vouchsafed to that house in the restoration from death of its head,—for *all* the unspeakable mercies that day had brought along with it,—coupled with a fervent petition, also, that the broken in heart might be healed, and they that mourned might be comforted.

I wondered several times that night how Harriet was to be



told of the danger she had passed through. She must know it, at all events, I thought, to-morrow, when the rest of the ceremony was to come, which must enlighten her. But I was content to leave to-morrow's cares to itself. It was a trifle, light as air, to what we had anticipated. How signally had our burden been removed from us! Could we be thankful enough? True, it had fallen upon others—heavily fallen; but—but—*she* was not our own!

To-morrow came,—the Sabbath morning,—and brought brightness with it, in the continued amendment of Mr. Scott. As Dr. Blackburn had said, 'he was likely to do well now,' and there was every prospect of a rapid recovery.

In the afternoon, just after the church hour was past, Harriet and I were sitting in her dressing-room, reading, or trying to do so, she reclining on the sofa. She might have been doing so in reality, to be sure (as she was in good spirits now, poor girl, and greatly cheered by a little visit to her husband's room she had just paid); but, I doubt with me it was mere pretence, as, although I held my Bible in my hand, I suspect Tom would have alleged that it was 'upside-down.' My thoughts were running over the last few days, and their signal events; and, also, I was expecting something now.

Presently I saw Sir James Elphinstone's carriage drive to the door, and himself, Sir John Maitland, and papa stepped out, the latter in gown and bands. I heard my husband go down to them, and then in a little they all came up, and went into Mr. Scott's room.

Then papa came in, and greeted us cheerfully.

'Harriet, my dear,' he began quietly, 'it seems there has been a flaw in your marriage ceremony, and it must be gone over again. Mr. Scott is anxious to have it put right at once; and Sir James Elphinstone and Sir John are waiting to see it done. Will you come with me now—Ellie and you?'

Harriet looked up at him, surprised, but not alarmed. 'A flaw!' she repeated. 'What could it be? Was it in the proclamations? I thought Mr. Morton had seen to all that. But I can't go in my dressing-gown before gentlemen, papa,'

she added, with a true feminine regard to appearances. 'I must change it first.'

'Oh, never mind your dress,' papa said. (If she had been arrayed in sackcloth, it would have been all the same to papa, he never observed.) 'I see nothing wrong with it, and, I am sure, neither will anybody else.' And with another 'Come away, my dear,' he led her away.

I followed. It was the first time I had seen Mr. Scott since the day he had alarmed me so in the garden; and certainly I would scarcely have recognised him again, so changed was he. His hair was all gone—his face pale and emaciated; and the hand that he stretched out to me was so thin that I very nearly 'upset matters' by crying outright over it. If I had not been assured that he was better, I would certainly never have thought it.

'I am not very presentable to receive company—am I, Helen?' said he, trying to get up a smile to hide the awkwardness he must have felt in seeing me, after all that had been.

I answered soothingly; and just then the servants entered, and Sir James Elphinstone and Sir John, from the adjoining room. Papa brought Harriet forward to the side of the bed, and the ceremony began. It was a solemn scene: she, as white almost as her dressing-gown, and a little tremulous now, a wistful, wondering expression in her dark eyes, standing by the bed where lay her husband, a pallid and emaciated form, just snatched as it were from the brink of the grave, and unable to do more than stretch forth a feeble hand to clasp the scarcely less tremulous hand that met his own. But his 'I will' was firmly given, and distinctly heard by all.

Papa made the ceremony brief; and deeply solemn was the benediction that followed. The most formidable part of it all was the signing. Mr. Scott, supported in my husband's arms, took the pen in his tremulous fingers, and managed, with an effort, and with one or two intervals, to trace the characters of his name. Harriet's followed, of course—Sir James Elphinstone, Sir John Maitland, and the butler affixing their names as witnesses,—and all was over.

Dr. Blackburn ordered the room to be cleared immediately, that the patient might rest; and Harriet, restored to all her usual quiet dignity, with a parting kiss to her husband (yes, hers now for ever), led the way from the room. Sir John and I were last; and I could not help smiling at the characteristic admonition which Sir John thought it necessary to administer to Mr. Scott as he took leave.

‘Now, young man,’ he said, trying to look very severe, ‘it is well for you that you are laid up there in bed, or I for one would have given you a sound rating for having put us to all this trouble; and if ever you try such a trick again, I’ll—I’ll—well, I’ll not say what I’ll do. But I think you’ve got a lesson—yes, I think you have.’

I saw Dr. Blackburn biting his lips to suppress a smile at this severe ‘rating;’ but, without waiting to see the effect of his words, the worthy baronet followed me from the room, satisfied that he had done his duty. I thought myself that Mr. Scott had got off cheaply from the consequences of his wrong-doing; but I rejoiced, on my sister’s account, that it was so; and, when I joined her afterwards, there were no shadows on either of our faces now.

At Harriet’s wish papa remained with us the rest of the afternoon—and a very different man he looked from what he had done for the last few terrible weeks. Dr. Blackburn, at ease now about his patient, also joined us at dinner, and I wondered a little what Harriet thought. I saw, however, that she had been enlightened in some way; and papa told me afterwards that she had asked him about it as soon as they were alone, and that he had simply told her that we had been mistaken—that Dr. Blackburn’s former marriage had been invalidated by previous circumstances—that I was all right now, but that it was altogether an unpleasant subject, and he hoped she would not allude to it again. I don’t think it ever entered her head to identify herself with it in any way; and she never alluded to it again, except that that evening, as she bade me good-night, she kissed and congratulated me on having my husband back again.

‘And such a husband, Ellie!’ she added, with tears in her eyes; ‘I am sure I can never, never forget all his kindness to mine; and I am sure Reginald feels it as much as I do.’

I was sure he did. Dr. Blackburn told me that that same evening he had thanked him earnestly for his unceasing kindness to him in all his illness, and expressed deep regret for all he had caused him to suffer. Some further words were also spoken between them that night, which I am no less sure will render the bond thus formed a lasting one on both sides—because one that will not end with earth!

The double funeral took place on the Monday following; and, by Mr. Scott’s orders, as the only reparation in his power to make, a handsome stone was put up to mark the last resting-place of the ill-fated girl, with this simple inscription:

‘DROWNED ON BOARD THE “ARCTURUS,”  
ON THE 19TH OF AUGUST 1863,  
CATHERINE, WIFE OF REGINALD FREDERICK SCOTT,  
AGED 22 YEARS.’

Over her short but erring life let us in charity draw a veil.





## CHAPTER XXV.

### VALEDICTORY.

'Though some speak ill  
Of thee, some will  
Say better,—there's an end.'



R. SCOTT'S recovery was rapid now, and *we* went home. My feelings, on crossing once again the threshold of that home I had never thought to enter more, it would be hard to describe,—as difficult as it would be to describe Jenny's gyrations, as she careered about the house, and broke in her progress—not a cake of shortbread this time, but several valuable pieces of crockery, in her delight at my return. *We* were in no mood for dancing; our hearts were too full of quiet joy, and of thankfulness for our great deliverance; 'truly we had been led by a way that we knew not, and by a path that we would not have chosen.' But we had been brought safely by His hand thus far; and whatever might be in store for us in the future, we would not now give way to fear.

But my happiness was to receive one check,—my old friend Robbie was drawing nigh to the end of his earthly pilgrimage. The excitement of the events above narrated had been too much for him, and had accelerated the heart-complaint under which, it appeared, he had been labouring for some years; and my husband was only released from close attendance on one friend to bestow it upon another.

There was no hope, however, in this case. Robbie was dying, and he knew it. My husband was with him as

constantly as his other duties would admit, and I also. The old man liked me to read or sing hymns to him, when he was able to listen, and to have me with him ; and almost every time I saw him he said, ' It was siccan a comfort till him to ken that I was oot o' my troubles, ony way.' Dear old Robbie ! his guileless self-forgetting nature was with him to the last !

Of his unfortunate daughter he never spoke ; his sorrow on her account was too sacred to be obtruded on human ear ; and, sensitively as he had guarded her name living, he guarded her memory now ; but he and I used often to talk—sometimes with my husband present (it was always too much for Mrs. Gourlay), but oftener alone—of that ' Father's house ' whither he was hastening, and where he had the good hope that his other children and their mother would follow him ere long.

Almost till the last he was able to sit up by the fire, in his arm-chair ; and there he sat and listened, while I read to him out of the old and well-worn Volume he had loved so well, or sang his favourite hymns.

I was sitting by him one day, reading one of his favourite chapters, while Mrs. Góurlay was intent on some household avocation, when we were all startled by a carriage drawing up before the door, followed by the apparition of Mr. Scott, who entered, supported by his valet. He looked very unfit for the exertion, and dropped rather than sat down on the chair which I hastily placed for him. I thought he was going to faint, and Mrs. Gourlay ran for the unfailing whisky-bottle ; while the servant produced a bottle of eau-de-Cologne, with which he was about to revive his master. But Mr. Scott waved them all aside.

' It is nothing,' he said—' I shall be better presently ; don't be alarmed.'

I was almost afraid that the commotion might have agitated Robbie ; but he was pretty well that day ; and I thought he looked pleased at the unexpected visit.

The servant withdrew, and I took up my gloves, intending

to follow, thinking Mr. Scott would not like me to remain, when he stopped me.

'Don't go, Helen,' he said ; 'I have nothing to say that all the world may not hear.'

Then Robbie spoke.

'Ye suldna hae cam' oot, sir,' he said ; 'ye're no' fit for't !'

I was afraid to observe the effect of the old man's words on Mr. Scott. It seemed as if he could not bear the kindness. But he controlled himself.

'You know what I have come to say, Mr. Gourlay,' he began, with an effort ; 'and, had I been ten times worse than I am, I must have tried to say it. You may yet, like me, be brought back from the very gates of death' (the old man shook his head at that, and Mr. Scott went on hurriedly) ; 'at least, let me hear you say now that you forgive me for all the grief I have brought on you and yours. Your daughter never can forgive me in this world ; but let me hear you say that you will. Give me the only comfort which the memory of this hour can ever afford.'

He passed his handkerchief over his clammy forehead, and leaned back exhausted. I wondered what the old man would say. But Robbie was never given to make speeches when his feelings were deeply touched, and it was well for both that he did not now. But he held out his hand, hardened by honest labour, and many a long day's toil.

'Shake hands, sir,' was all he said.

Mr. Scott grasped the rough and sunburnt hand in both of his ; and tears he had no need to be ashamed of stood in his eyes as he did so.

A word or two the old man did say, after this.

'It's no' for the like o' me to gie advice to a gentleman like you, sir,' he said ; 'but ye'll maybe tak' ae word frae an auld man that's near dune wi' the warld, an' a' that's in't. Ye hae been trysted wi' mony things—hooses, an' lands, an' a' ; an' oh, after this, dinna ye hide the talents that's been gien ye in a naipkin ; but look aboot ye, to see what ye can dae for the Maister ; for ye ken, sir, ye'll hae to gie an accoont o't a' at

last. Ye see, ye're like a ceety set on a hill,—ye canna be hid ; an' eh, see, after this, an' set the folk a guid example.'

Whether Mr. Scott fully understood every word of Robbie's Doric, I cannot say, but he certainly took up the spirit.

He grasped again the rough but kindly hand.

'I will, I will,' he said earnestly,—'I promise you, I will.'

How much longer the interview might have lasted I know not, but Mr. Scott looked so exhausted that I suggested his returning to the carriage. He assented, and attempted to rise with my assistance, but it would not do, and I called the valet. Before he went, he once more took the old man's hand, and said he hoped to hear better accounts of him to-morrow.

A shake of the head was the response.

'But I'm misdootin', sir,' he added, 'that there'll no' be guid accoonts o' you the morn. Jist ye gang to yer bed again, an' tak' tent o' yoursel', an' dinna gang about this lang time yet. Ye're no' fit for't.'

Mrs. Gourlay followed him to the door. He shook hands with her, and was assisted into the carriage ; and either his helpless state, or his politeness, had quite won upon her, as she exclaimed vehemently when she came back, 'I'm sure he never meant to dae ony ill to a livin' cratur ; an' if he has, he's dune a' he could, puir lad, to mak' up for't.'

Robbie said nothing, but I thought he was pleased with the visit.

After this, Robbie wanted for nothing that Dalmany could supply,—flowers to his heart's content, and grapes, and game. And my husband told me further, that Mr. Scott had empowered him to let Robbie know that it was his intention to settle an annuity on Mrs. Gourlay and her daughters, which would place them above want for the rest of their lives,—which Robbie received with deep thankfulness. 'The Lord was smoothing his way kindly for him,' he said.

But all these little kindnesses could not keep Robbie with us. One evening, about a week after this, I had left him pretty well, and thinking he might yet see many days ; but



on Dr. Blackburn going, as usual, in the morning, he found him gone. Peacefully and gently he had gone to his rest.

Four days afterwards, Marianne and I stood at *our* dining-room window to see our old friend Robbie carried to his last resting-place ; and our tears fell fast as we watched the slow procession winding along the bridge (where he had so often walked with vigorous foot, shouldering his faithful tools), on its way to the old churchyard, where, beneath the shadow of the ancient trees which Robbie had tended and loved so well, he was laid to rest.

In the absence of all near kindred, my husband (by Robbie's own desire) followed as chief mourner (Mr. Scott, who would have done so, being still closely confined to bed). Papa and Sir John Maitland attended, and nearly every man in the parish besides, to show this last tribute of respect to one who had so long lived respected and beloved among them. Truly, as Sir John remarked that day, 'A good name is better than riches.'

Farewell, Robbie ! friend of my childhood ! Long will it be ere I see thy like again ! Years would have passed, I had trusted, before thy grey head was laid beneath the sod ! Perhaps, but for the sins of others, thou mightest have reached a green old age, or even passed the threescore and ten years allotted to man ; but thou art gone, and we repine not ! Thy bark can no longer be tossed on the tempestuous sea of life ; for thou hast reached the eternal Haven where thou didst desire to dwell !

Mrs. Gourlay and her daughters did not remain long in Colston after her husband's death. She said 'she couldna bide the place withoot him ;' and, taking a sorrowful leave of her neighbours, and of us, they went to reside with their relations at Dumfries,—Mr. Scott's liberality enabling them to live in very great comfort.

I often hear from them ; and a letter I had the other day from my old Sabbath scholar Margaret apprised me of her

intended marriage with a respectable young farmer in the neighbourhood, whom she is to bring some day 'to let me see.'

As regards Mr. Morton, he had evidently thought it unwise to disregard the hints he had received that his presence was no longer desired in the neighbourhood, and had accordingly taken French leave, evaporating with as much of Mr. Scott's as he could conveniently carry along with him. It was popularly reported that, on the news being brought to the village of Kitty Gourlay's death—before he departed—he was as a man possessed. His rage knew no bounds, to think that Mr. Scott had escaped the punishment he had hoped to see fall upon him.

His abrupt departure, of course, caused considerable inconvenience to Mr. Scott, who found his affairs in rather a puzzling state of confusion; but he considered that a light penalty to pay, and set to work himself with praiseworthy diligence; and, with the assistance of his new factor, recommended by Sir John, things were in a short time again put on a proper footing. The new factor was soon as deservedly popular with his subordinates as Mr. Morton had been the opposite, and was in every way fitted for his 'responsibilities,' as the condition of the Dalmany lands and the satisfaction of the tenantry amply evinced.

Mr. Morton's coadjutor, Mr. Charteris,—albeit he had not the same reasons for making a 'moonlight flitting' as his old ally,—found as little inducement to remain, as the villagers, left now to 'the freedom of their own sweet will,' left the chapel to himself and his candlesticks, and, to a man, flocked back to the old sanctuary; and the county families having also turned their backs upon him and his 'innovations,' he judged it expedient to return whence he had come, wherever that was. Mr. Scott appointed no successor; and the chapel remains closed to this day, open only to sight-seers and antiquaries, who take an interest in archaic details.

The chapel, as I have said, was closed; and when the heir of Dalmany arrived, not long after, he was baptized by his grandfather, in the parish church of Colston!

By the way, it was not till this young gentleman was some weeks old that Harriet was made aware how near she had unwittingly been to losing her home and her husband. She learned it from the lips of him who had the best right to tell her, and who, I am sure, has since then done all that man can do to atone to her for his wrong-doing, and to wipe out the memory of that dreadful time from the hearts of all of us.

Mr. Scott's first appearance in public, after his 'raising up,' was when he stood in Colston Church, his wife seated by his side, and held up his child to be baptized in the name of the Lord, and be numbered with the Church on earth. It was a solemn and a touching scene, for all, as well as for us; and many kindly and loving hearts besides ours wished countless blessings for the young parents who were thus dedicating their little one to Him who had so signally interposed to bless their house.

'He has the winsomest face I ever saw,—an' he's his ain sel' again,' said old Andrew Gray (now happily reinstated in his old home, as was every one else who had been 'dispossessed'), as he walked past me to the church-door. 'Blessin's on him! there's no' a heart but warms to the lad, that's seen him the day!' And most truly our hearts echoed the blessing.

'The haill parish' stood at the church-door to shake hands with 'the Laird,' and welcome him among them again, and then crowded into the vestry to get a sight of the little heir; and Mr. Scott was evidently touched and gratified beyond measure by the warmth of the demonstration.

'Don't make too much of him, or you will turn his head,' said Sir John laughingly, to the crowd, as he came forward and shook hands also, 'and that will be worse than anything that has happened yet.'

'May I be spared to atone in some measure for the wrong I have done them all!' Mr. Scott said, in a low tone of deep emotion, to papa and Dr. Blackburn, who were standing beside him, as the people dispersed.

'And please God you will!' papa answered in the same

tone. Dr. Blackburn silently gave him his hand, and they went to the vestry.

We spent the rest of that Sabbath afternoon at the Manse (Mr. Scott, and Harriet, and we), Mr. Dodds kindly taking the evening service, so that papa did not require to leave us. And as we sat after dinner, round the dining-room fire in the winter darkness waiting for tea, we 'talked together' (as we had never talked before) 'of all the things that had happened,' and of all that the Lord had done for us as a family, from 'the days of old' until now; and words were spoken that night which I am sure will not be lost either for time or for eternity.

Before separating for our respective homes, we joined together in family prayers, at which Mr. Scott had requested papa to offer special thanksgiving for the great deliverance that had been vouchsafed to his house (it had not been thought right in the circumstances to do so in church). Before doing so, we sang some verses of the 103rd Psalm, Marianne's sweet voice as usual leading; and it was pleasant to hear the full-hearted earnestness and warmth with which every voice, even Nurse's (which she said 'wasna sae guid as it ance was'), joined in the grand old Jewish thanksgiving song.

After this papa read the 34th and 116th Psalms, which have so fittingly expressed the thankful and trusting feelings of the children of God for many generations. And then we all knelt around the family altar, and joined together in thanking the Lord for His unspeakable mercy and love to those so near and dear to us. Papa found it hard to command his voice so as to put his thanksgiving into words, for all to join, but he did so most fully and happily, amid the hardly restrained emotion of all present. And when we rose from our knees, the long and solemn silence which followed spoke more for the effect than any words could have done.

'I am not afraid for him now,' papa said, when we had returned for a few minutes to the dining-room, after seeing Mr. Scott and Harriet off. 'Affliction has brought him back

to his Father, as it brought the prodigal of old, and I believe that he will have no desire ever again to quit the Father's house.'

'Then indeed his mother's prayer is answered, and he is safe,' mama said, with deep and earnest feeling. 'You remember Sir John told us how trustfully she had left him in the care of "the Father of the fatherless," praying almost with her latest breath "that his way might be hedged on both sides—with thorns, if need be—only let him be kept from straying out of the narrow path leading to the heavenly Home."'

And all is well with Mr. Scott, and there are 'blessings on him,'—that blessing, above all, that 'maketh rich, and that adds no sorrow.' He has taken Robbie's parting charge to heart, and 'looked about him to see what he could do for the Master;' and I must say for him that whatever his hand finds to do he does with all his might. He has gone into Parliament, and my husband predicts that ere long he will be one of the most noted and distinguished speakers there. He is already well known as—in the best sense—'the people's friend.'

Harriet seconds him, with all her heart, in all the good he does; and he is as much her lover as he was on the day of their runaway marriage (for I tell them I will always call it that). The great sorrow she had had to bear in her husband's deadly illness, as well as in his previous harassments (which must, of course, have shadowed her also, though she was ignorant of their cause), had been exactly the discipline she had needed to temper the otherwise bright and prosperous life with which she has been blessed,—compelling her to pause and reflect; and, like her husband, she has come out of the furnace 'like gold seven times purified.' As I said of her at the beginning of my story, I say now of them both, 'They shed a blessed radiance' wherever they go.

It is rumoured in certain high quarters that the long-forfeited title of the Scotts will ere long be restored, and that Earls of Colston will once more tread the ancient soil.

The tenantry and people of Colston are in great excitement and delight at the prospect, and are already planning all sorts of grand doings in anticipation of the event. But Mr. Scott is not greatly concerned about that, and neither is Harriet.

Colonel Elphinstone returned last month from India (where he has been with his regiment for the last four years), on the occasion of his younger sister's marriage to 'the youth' I had seen at Woodlands; a youth, however, no longer, as he has come to 'discretion' now, and to his property. The family, I believe, are well pleased,—at least I know the Colonel is, for he told me so when I had the pleasure of meeting him the other day at Woodlands. He has brought back his lisp with him in perfection, and his eye-glass also, but we would not know him without these. He has come home a changed man altogether,—a decided Christian, and consequently improved in all other respects as well,—and is simply one of the most amiable of human beings. I am not sure that he has entirely forgiven me for not having better appreciated him long ago, but, for all that, I hope we will continue friends.

The Elphinstones, as a family, are now as cordial with Harriet as formerly they were the reverse—owing, perhaps, in some measure, to their thankfulness at having escaped a far more distasteful connection, but still more in consequence of their increasing admiration and affection for herself; and Lady Elphinstone is as often heard to quote the opinion of 'my niece Mrs. Scott,' as of 'my daughter Lady Carleton,' or 'Mrs. Gordon.'

Sir John Maitland is as jovial as ever. If only he had an heir to Woodlands, his felicity would be without a drawback. I always accuse him of coveting Harriet's boys (she has two now, and an infant girl as well); but he stoutly denies that, and maintains that his wife is 'better to him than ten sons.'

Papa and mama seem to be renewing their youth, and growing younger and younger every day, we tell them. They

have been very lonely though, of late years, with only Harry at home, as our sweet Marianne went out to Charlie two years ago. An unexpected piece of good fortune had befallen him, and she had joined him sooner than had been contemplated. Lizzie complains bitterly of Marianne having also cheated her of bride's cake and favours, but of course that could not be helped. He seems to be prospering greatly in India, and will not be long of 'making his fortune,' as the phrase is; although Nurse was dubious about the marriage,—having Harriet and me, I suppose, before her eyes,—and privately implored papa to inquire strictly into his antecedents in India, 'as he might have a dozen black wives already, for anything we knew.' But papa was not afraid; and we are looking forward with great pleasure to seeing Mr. and Mr. Charles Fitz-James home, for a six months' holiday, at Christmas.

Marianne's grandest achievement as a matron has been in introducing her old friend Captain Craufurd (who, with his regiment, is stationed out there just now) to a young lady, whom he declares to be a second edition of herself, and the world says 'it will be a match immediately.'

Mr. Farquharson has changed his profession since Harriet's marriage. He has turned his back on the law, and taken to theology instead. Whether the change was consequent on that event or not, was only known to himself; he bore himself as usual everywhere (after the first surprise), and 'made no sign.' Though when Tom came out from Edinburgh one day, and reported that 'Mr. Farquharson was coming out for the Church;' and when papa told us, shortly after, that the Major had been lamenting to him that 'that foolish boy,' his nephew, had 'thrown away all his brilliant prospects at the Bar, to begin his life over again in a totally different line, and for no reason at all,'—I thought I could understand the feeling, but, like him, 'I made no sign.' Whether the Church is likely to be a gainer by the change may be an open question; judging by the successive summers spent in Germany, as well as by some recent contributions to (so-called) 'modern thought' in some of the leading journals, I should

say not ; however, I am very thankful that I am not called upon to be his judge.

He completed his theological course more than a year ago, and has since been acting as 'Assistant' to one of the most 'advanced' clergymen and congregations in Edinburgh, and I have no doubt he is the right man in the right place. His society is much sought after, I understand, in the cultured circles of the metropolis, and, as of old, he is as popular with ladies (old or young) as with gentlemen. But whether it is owing to the dissimilarity of our views on most subjects, or to some other cause,—though he is pleasant as ever when we do happen to meet,—we see very little of him now.

My dear cousin and school-friend, Louisa Maitland, has not had the bright and prosperous life I had fondly pictured for her in our girlish days ; with her graceful figure and her lovely face (resembling Harriet's as moonlight resembles sunlight, with a sweet pensive expression which Harriet never had till recent years), I had thought her one whom Fortune was sure to smile upon. I had hoped once, in the old days, that Mr. Farquharson, who had known her from childhood, and who was 'so critical and fastidious in everything, would have had the good sense and taste to appreciate my Louy—they would have done each other good in many ways ; but this did not turn out the case ; Mr. Farquharson remains as he was to this day,—all ladies seeming the same to him,—but courted and caressed everywhere, to his old uncle's unbounded pride, and having friends and acquaintances by the hundred ; while Louisa married Mr. Dunbar (another early friend of her own, and a most exemplary young clergyman), and, after a brief union of barely two years, is back again in her father's house, a sad young widow and childless.

My cousin Marian has married Mr. Frank Dunbar, and gone out with him to Bombay, very near Marianne. Two of their brothers are there also ; so that Uncle Maitland's house is about as deserted as Colston Manse ; and, but for aunt, and Lizzie, and Charlie,—the youngest ones,—my poor Louisa would be lonely indeed.



The home in Charlotte Street is still unbroken (except for Charlie); neither Mary nor Lizzie having as yet seen any one who can tempt them to 'leave their mammy.' But I have on one or two occasions of late met a young banker there, who I am pretty sure will very soon try at least to tempt Lizzie. He is a very pleasant, as well as a very prosperous young man; and I most cordially wish him all success in his hopes.

As for my husband,—what shall I say of him? There is not such another man in the whole wide world! I sometimes fear I am in danger of breaking the first commandment, and setting up for myself an idol. But I must not do that.

He has recently turned his attention to one particular branch of medical science, in which he has had one or two celebrated 'cases,' which have attracted the attention of some of the stars in the medical world, and gained him such fame that Jenny foretells 'the Colston folk'll no' hae him lang.' But I would not like to leave Colston, and I am sure he would not either.

Tom has turned out a popular preacher, in spite of his own indifference to admiration or applause, in proof of which I may state that he was only three months licensed when he was unanimously chosen by the people of Westermuir to succeed Mr. Wood, who was translated to Longdales. And, as I said at the beginning, I am writing this from his manse, during almost the first holiday trip my husband has taken since he commenced practice. Although, of course, being his sister, I can't rave about him as his people do, yet I must say he does *very* well. Mama has spared Nurse for a while to keep his house, till he gets a wife, which he says won't be in a hurry. But I am not so sure of that.

Tom has been more than a year settled in Westermuir, but this is my first visit here: I had a severe cold at the time of the ordination, and could not accompany the others to witness it, and since then something has always come in the way to prevent me going. Now, however, that Dr. Blackburn is

taking this trip to Rome along with papa and Sir John Maitland and Mr. Scott, I am delighted to have this pleasant holiday, in my dearly loved old home.

Mama and Harriet, with Harry (now nearly twelve years old) and all the children, joined us the week after I came here, so that we are a very numerous family for a bachelor's house. But it was his own invitation, and certainly there is room enough for us all under the old roof,—our own dear old nursery being once again in requisition for those little ones of the second generation. Nurse is just in her element, and in the highest felicitation at having us all together again ('except' Miss Marianne) under her own care. She told me the other night, that 'Betsy and she jist felt that it was the dear old days back again.' And I must say that sometimes, when I am sitting at the window, in the little room that was Willie's, over the front door, and look down on the little things at play on the grass under the laburnum-tree, exactly as we ourselves used to do, I almost feel for a moment or so like Nurse,—that it is 'the old days again,' and that this is still my home. But no, no,—the old, happy, childish days *are* gone, and I would not recall them if I could; the present and the future are far sweeter to me.

By the way, I had nearly forgotten to say that I had a visit, the day before I left home, from Mr. M'Call. He is a candidate for a vacant church in Inverness, and wished Dr. Blackburn's influence. He and I had a good laugh over our former meeting; and I made my long-deferred apology to him then. He is very much improved in every way, and left Colston armed with introductions to influential people, from papa and Dr. Blackburn, which he says 'will be sure to carry the day.'

Before he left he was gratified by a sight of 'sister' *in propria persona*, who came in as he was going away (to make some good-bye visits with me,—to the churchyard among others), and he privately gave it as his opinion that 'it was no wonder Mr. Scott had cut with her,'—which little expression, however, was the only solecism he committed.

And now, reader, farewell ! If, as I said, clouds and darkness have overshadowed me, they have not found an abiding place. Truly, I may say, goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life, and my full cup runneth over ! And, as dear old Robbie would have said, ‘ I want for naething, but a mair thankfu heart.’

THE END.



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